

Restoring the historic fabric of NOLA neighborhoods

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Tulane alumna Pat O'Brien received an Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation from the Louisiana Landmarks Society for her work restoring over 20 homes in the historic 7th Ward of New Orleans, including this one on North Roman Street. (Photos from Pat O'Brien)

Tulane University alumna Pat O'Brien has restored over 20 homes in the historic 7th Ward, the original Creole neighborhood of New Orleans.

Using the historic tax credit offered by the State of Louisiana, O'Brien has bought reasonably priced properties, restored them and rented them out to residents of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, many of whom would not have been able to find affordable housing otherwise.

Since the 1980s, the lifelong Louisiana resident who received a Ph.D. in Spanish and Portuguese literature from Tulane has been restoring homes that were being sold by

the owners or sold for taxes in her neighborhood. According to O'Brien, there was very little interest in the area at the time.

For her efforts, the Louisiana Landmarks Society presented an Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation to O'Brien earlier this year.

"Because I did so much [historic restoration] in one place, it revitalized the neighborhood," O'Brien says. She has noticed more historic building restoration since Hurricane Katrina, as owners and developers have been encouraged by others' work and hope to maintain the city's history.

According to O'Brien, historically preserving a home involves retaining as much of the historic fabric as possible and searching for missing or broken elements in establishments like the [Green Project](#), an organization that repurposes materials, diverting items from landfills.

O'Brien believes her historic preservation award serves as an example of what aspiring designers and owners can do in neighborhoods that aren't necessarily well known or prestigious.

Tulane architecture professor [Eugene Cizek](#), a member of the Louisiana Landmarks Society selection committee, identified O'Brien as a key player in promoting historic preservation in New Orleans.

"She has been a role model and an inspiration to people wanting to bring this city back to the incredible position that it holds in the world," said Cizek.

Emily Field is a junior at Tulane University majoring in communication, political science and Spanish.

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