

Project set to get money



Advocate staff photo by BRYAN TUCK

U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., left, tours the grounds of the Acadiana Outreach Center in Lafayette on Thursday morning along with, from second left, University of Louisiana at Lafayette Professor Hector LaSala, Acadiana Outreach Center Development Director Joan Savoy and Acadiana Outreach Center CEO Valerie Keller.

Landrieu marks money for homeless

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LAFAYETTE

U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., toured the Acadiana Outreach Center on Thursday to view the operation and deliver the news that \$280,000 in federal money may be en route.

Landrieu said she earmarked the money in a federal highway and housing spending bill that she said will likely be merged into a larger spending bill that, she said, is sure to pass.

The Outreach Center is a nonprofit organization providing aid, services and housing for homeless people in the area, with the idea of returning them to self-sufficiency.

The center intends to use the money on the planning and study of conversion of a 14,000-square-foot brick warehouse at 114 Olivier St. into a multistory complex of apartments with commercial space on the first floor for such things as day care, a coffee shop or an art studio.

Work has already begun on cleaning the warehouse for use, and Uni-

versity of Louisiana at Lafayette architecture students have developed concepts for what is being called the "Lofts at Olivier."

"The space itself reflects the mission," Landrieu said. "You've really taken a broken down space and made it beautiful."

Valerie Keller, CEO of the center, said she wants to see the center move beyond its role of providing services, housing and help with job placement to begin working with de-

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velopers to provide affordable housing.

She said the project, when built, would not be restricted to low-income residents, but would allow for a mix of people and families of several income levels.

The Olivier development could be the starting point for a hoped-for 27 blocks of affordable housing in downtown Lafayette, she said.

Keller said the goal for the center is to move toward dealing with the root causes of homelessness, and one of the big factors in Lafayette is a shortage of affordable housing.

A number of the people who turn to the Outreach Center for help, especially women with children, may have jobs but simply cannot make ends meet financially, she said.

Landrieu said she had already earmarked the funding for the center, but wanted to see the operation in person.

"I really believe in what's going on here," she said. "I hadn't been able to see it, but did hear about it."

Landrieu said she was impressed by both what she heard and what she saw of the operation.

"When people hear about the Acadiana Outreach Center, they'll think it's a dream factory," she said.

Landrieu said that all people dream of what their lives will be when they are young, but those dreams do not always work out. "Life is hard for many people, and sometimes it's so hard that it beats the heck out of them and this is where they come," she said.

Landrieu said the center gives those people the chance to start building their dreams again.

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