

Acadiana Outreach Center looks ahead with \$280K grant

Landrieu says agency offers hope, dreams

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U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu announced Thursday a \$280,000 federal earmark to help Acadiana Outreach Center create a mixed-use, mixed-income housing development in downtown Lafayette.

The center, a social service agency that operates a day shelter, women's and children's shelter and job training center, wants to purchase a 15,000 square-foot brick former warehouse at 114 Olivier St., which sits in the middle of its campus.

Using federal funds, grants and private funding sources, CEO Valerie Keller envisions expanding the building upward to create rental space for low- to moderate-income individuals and families such as teachers, artists, municipal employees and young professionals.

The bottom floor of the building could be converted to commercial space for art galleries, day care and job training, she said.

The project represents a new direction for Acadiana Outreach Center from helping individuals with food, clothing and other vital services, to revitalizing the neighborhood and creating housing solutions for those in need, Keller said.

Often, the center sees citizens, especially women and children, who cannot afford housing in Lafayette. The housing development, called the Lofts at Olivier, can fill that gap in services and invigorate the entire neighborhood.

"I really believe in what's going on here," Landrieu said Thursday after touring the Outreach Center campus. "It's a dream factory. People have come here who have given up all hope of the dreams they had. They need us to help them dream again."

Landrieu, a New Orleans Democrat who placed the \$280,000 earmark in the 2008 Transportation and Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill, pledged further support for the project as needed.

The federal money will be used to complete a feasibility study, develop a financing strategy, acquire the property and assist with architectural designs. UL architecture students already are creating designs, and Keller said she expects the project to move forward quickly.