



New Orleans REALTORS® Bring Life Back to Beloved City Landmark With “Better Block” Redevelopment Project – December 2014

New Orleans knows a little something about rebuilding. And when thousands of REALTORS® descended on the Crescent City for the annual meetings of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® a few weeks back, the local hosting association had a great example to share with visiting leadership, members, and association staff.

With the help of a \$15,000 Smart Growth Action Grant from NAR, the New Orleans Metropolitan Association of REALTORS® (NOMAR) supported a Better Block redevelopment project where it was sorely needed in the still-recovering city. By bringing in the Better Block organization to concentrate its innovative 'living charrette' strategy on a stretch of LaSalle Street in central New Orleans, NOMAR has given real hope to the desolate block that is home to the historic Dew Drop Inn -- and to that storied music venue, itself, where, for decades, legends like Little Richard and Ray Charles used to light up the night.

Kelli Walker, NOMAR's Senior Director of Government Affairs, explains that the Better Block model fit perfectly with what her association is trying to do to help struggling neighborhoods in the city, and to forge stronger connections with like-minded organizations. To create a broad-based partnership for the Better Block project, NOMAR teamed up with the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority and Harmony Neighborhood Development, a trusted non-profit that had already rebuilt portions of LaSalle Street not far from the Dew Drop block.

Working together, they made the block better for the November 7 event, and gave the community a clear vision of what could become a reality with continued resolve and effort. Back in August, a portion of the NAR grant brought Andrew Howard, one of the principals of the Better Block organization, to the LaSalle Street site for an initial keynote visit. Sharing his expertise with the partnership and community stakeholders, he helped them to formulate a plan for the November event.

NOMAR coordinated local artists and neighborhood children to paint blighted properties with hopeful murals. The Dew Drop Inn lined up the music. Food vendors from the pop-up market that Harmony Development has created in a nearby vacant lot were on site, welcoming the opportunity to sell to a large crowd. The event served as a kick-start for fundraising for the Dew Drop Inn's third-generation owner, who has long had hopes and plans to revive the family business, but without adequate funding or resources. "Much of the street has been successfully redeveloped," says Walker, "but the Dew Drop Inn has needed this extra push." Two local news channels covered the Better Block event, crediting the REALTORS® with giving a beloved New Orleans landmark the lift it needs.

Walker says that the effect of the activity was amazing. "When the community saw what was going on, neighbors came out in droves, saying 'How can we help?!' It was so heartening. They were starved for support, but wanted to be a part of it, not just passive recipients. That is what the Better Block program does - it empowers the locals to do what they know is right for their own neighborhoods."



Holly Moskerintz, NAR's Community Programs Outreach Manager, notes that NAR has provided Smart Growth Action Grants for several other Better Block projects in the past few years, and that these events really show the essence of one key aspect of the REALTOR® Party: REALTORS® engaged in their communities. "NAR's incoming President, Chris Polychron, was there paying close attention, and was given a personal hardhat tour of the Dew Drop site by the owner," says Moskerintz, adding, "A number of our Smart Growth Committee Advisory Members attended the event, too. It's great that they were able to see the effect of what their grants are doing, there on the ground."

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of New Orleans are bringing life back to their neighborhoods, one block at a time, contact Kelli Walker, the New Orleans Metropolitan Association of REALTORS®' Senior Director of Government Affairs, at Kelli@nomar.org or (504) 274-0705. For more information on the Better Block program, contact Holly Moskerintz, Community Programs Outreach Manager of the National Association of REALTORS®, at hmoskerintz@realtors.org or 202-383-1157.



The event served as a kick-start for fundraising for the renewal of the historic Dew Drop Inn



NAR President Chris Polychron and NOMAR Government Affairs Director Kelli Walker chat at the beginning of the event



NAR President Chris Polychron meets attendees, as well as current and past owners of the Dew Drop Inn, which has been a family-owned business for three generations.