



Everything New Orleans

Federal City anchor set in place in Algiers

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By

Hailing bipartisanship as well as public and private partnerships, officials heralded last week the new national headquarters for Marine Forces Reserve and Marine Forces North, the fortress-like structure in Algiers that has been dubbed the anchor for the Federal City project.



SUSAN POAG/ THE TIMES-PICAYUNE More than 300 people Monday, June 27, 2011 attended the dedication of the Joseph J. McCarthy Building for the Marine Forces Reserve Facility in Algiers. The \$166 million 29-acre compound is the national headquarters for Reserve units and 187 Reserve sites nationwide.

While the 1,300 Marines and civilians who work for the commands had already moved into the new facility, officials gathered June 27 to ceremonially say the project is now a reality.

"This is a great day," said state Rep. Jeff Arnold, D-Algiers, and chairman of the Algiers Development District Board, which is using a portion of sales tax revenue to fund the project.

Arnold called the Algiers Development District Board Federal City's "master landlord," while referring to the nonprofit entity created in 2004 to develop the

project, the New Orleans Federal Alliance, as "our partner."

Retired Marine Corps Maj. Gen. David Mize called the building's delivery to the Marine Corps "the first down-payment on one of Louisiana's largest economic development projects."

State and city officials entertained the Federal City concept about a decade ago, envisioning a campus within the Naval Support Activity for the Navy and Marine Corps reserve headquarters and other military commands and governmental entities. In the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure round, known as BRAC, the Navy and Defense Department recommended the base be closed.

But city and state officials cried foul, saying they already had been in discussions with the Navy about transforming the base. A BRAC Commission, charged with reviewing military recommendations, overruled the Navy and Defense Department's recommendation after hearing Louisiana's argument.

"Our concept carried the day," Mize said.

Named the Joseph J. McCarthy Building, it is inside the 29-acre secure compound called Marine Corps Support Facility, New Orleans. Aside from a section of military family housing, the rest of the Naval Support Activity will be closed Sept. 15 and transformed into the Federal City mixed-use development comprising businesses, residences and schools.

New Orleans City Council President Jackie Clarkson, who has been involved with the project since its conception, called it "a dream come true." She recounted the hardships encountered along the way, particularly the state and city's victory in convincing the BRAC Commission to overrule the Navy and Defense Department.

"Mission impossible is a mission complete," Clarkson said.

Mayor Mitch Landrieu said Algiers will see changes. "I don't think this area is going to be recognizable in years to come," he said.

"We made it happen because it was a priority," Rep. Cedric Richmond, D-New Orleans said.

Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., thanked Mize for returning to New Orleans after he retired in 2003 from the Marine Corps. She said Democrats and Republicans joined forces on the project, which "took all our political skills and acumen" to reverse the closure recommendation.

Days after the BRAC Commission voted to allow the state and city to move forward with the project, Hurricane Katrina struck. The commission set a September 2008 deadline to get funding in place and to commence construction.

Working with contractor Woodward Design+Build, Mathes Brierre Architects designed the building using tilt-wall construction, "a system normally associated with simple and quick warehouse construction," said Lawrence Adams, senior vice president for Mathes Brierre Architects.

Reinforced concrete panels were erected at the site and hoisted by crane into place. After the ceremony, Adams said the tilting of the panels into position during construction "appeared symbolic of soldiers standing to attention," a process that recalled Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal's "famous photograph of the Marines lifting the flag at Iwo Jima."

“The resulting building exhibits strength, order and discipline appropriate to the values of our proud military,” Adams said.

The development team, HRI/ECC, has begun redeveloping the Navy base. A 1,000-space parking garage with retail space on the lower floor should be available in coming weeks, where people assigned to Marine Forces Reserve can park and eat. A 400-seat auditorium is being built that will be available for military and public use.

McCarthy was an enlisted Marine before World War II who was given a battlefield commission and later awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the February 1945 invasion of Iwo Jima. After the war, he was a Marine Reservist, retiring in 1971 with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

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