



United Way  
of Northeast Louisiana

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Local developers, agencies breathe new life into historic Miller-Roy building, opening Feb. 2**

**MONROE, La.** — The historic Miller-Roy building, once a vital part of African American culture in downtown Monroe, is officially reopening to the community as of its Thursday, Feb. 2 ribbon cutting at 3:00 p.m.

Located at 1001 DeSiard St. in Monroe, the Miller-Roy building was built in 1929 by local dentist and doctor, Dr. J.C. Roy and Dr. J.T. Miller. The second floor was once home to several African American-owned businesses, including doctors, dentists, beauty salons, pool halls, restaurants, and insurance agents.

The third floor featured the Savoy Ballroom, eventually a stop on the Chitlin' Circuit, hosting acts such as Louis Armstrong, Count Basie and his orchestra, Turner Bradshaw, Billy Eckstine, Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne and the Andy Kirk Band, Marie Knight, the Nina McKenzie Group, the Lucky Miller Band, Rosetta Tharpe and Ethel Waters.

While the Miller-Roy building thrived in the 1930s and '40s, by the 1970s it was considered an abandoned piece of North Louisiana history. After a 2010 Monroe City Council vote for demolition seemed to seal the fate of the historic structure, the Miller-Roy building was added to the National Historic Register in 2011, bringing a glimmer of hope for future possibilities.

Thanks to the passion and vision of developers Ben Marshall and Michael Echols, the building, uninhabitable and in significant disrepair, received a complete renovation. The process took a total of 16 months.

A 5,000 square foot community resource center is now located on the first floor of the historic building for several nonprofit organizations to assist with connection to community resources such as access to safe and affordable financial products, asset ownership programs, credit improvement services, financial coaching and education, free tax preparation assistance, screening and referrals for homeless services, housing stability counseling, incentivized savings programs, workforce development soft skills, employment opportunities and job training. This collaboration includes the Home Coalition, Ouachita Workforce Development Board 81, United Way of Northeast Louisiana, and United Way NELA 211.

"Stable housing is the platform for success in all areas of life. In our area, many families face homelessness because they struggle to access services at the time they most need them," said Sarah B. Johnson, Executive Director of The HOME Coalition. "The Miller-Roy complex removes that barrier by co-locating key services in the heart of Monroe. This is a vital step in our shared vision of creating a community free of homelessness where all people feel safe and valued."

Doretha Bennett, Executive Director of the Ouachita Workforce Development Board 81, says the project "will support a viable and qualified workforce, which ultimately sustains current businesses and entices new businesses. Fulfilling the needs of a vibrant and expanding employment base is integral to our community's success, and that's what we are here to do."

In 1956, United Givers Fund of Ouachita Parish, now United Way of Northeast Louisiana, was founded. One of the organization's original partner agencies was Twin City Colored Community Welfare (TCCCW). TCCCW was already an established agency in the community, originally founded by Rev. I. Garland Penn, Pastor of Martin Temple CME Church on Adams St. in the 1930s. Corrine and Abraham Bowie were the first Executive Directors and Ted Richard was the first Board Chair. All served the agency faithfully for many years.

A United Way logo hung on the Miller-Roy building to recognize its partner agency, whose name later changed to Twin City Community Welfare (TCCW). That original logo now hangs inside the renovated property alongside a commemorative plaque honoring TCCW and United Way's history in the building.

"This revitalization project is an incredibly special one because United Way was a part of the original impact of the historic Miller-Roy Building and now we get to be a part of its future," said Janet Durden, President of United Way of Northeast Louisiana. "This collaboration will develop an integrated approach to improving the financial stability of Ouachita Parish residents. Community members will have access to a wide variety of services, including income support, employment and educational opportunities, asset-building services, and more. United Way is so thankful to be a part of this legacy."

Architect Cedrick Hemphill assembled a group of community leaders to select a name for the new building adjacent to the historic Miller-Roy building. The committee included Cedrick Hemphill, Pastor James Johnson, Kema Dawson, Carday Marshal, Kenneth Wilson, Matthew Williams, and Christie Echols (as a non-voting member). The name Bayou Savoy was chosen in celebration of the dance hall and event space, "The Savoy Ball Room," which was located at the top of the original Miller-Roy building and part of the Chitlin Circuit. More about the fascinating history of the Miller-Roy building can be seen on the first floor of the original structure, where a museum installation can be found. The second and third floors of the building consist of 18 affordable homes reserved for families earning up to 20% to 80% of the area median income.

"Eligibility to live in the housing development is based on household income," said Echols.

The development is funded through a \$15 million investment from the Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant Program, State and Federal Historic Tax Credits and additional financing was provided by Hunt Capital Partners (HCP) through \$6.4 million in LIHTC equity.

"Not only does the completion of Miller-Roy building preserve its deeply rooted historical significance, but it's also beneficial for the reinvigoration of the Monroe community," said Dana Mayo, Executive Managing Director of Hunt Capital Partners. "We're pleased to participate in this great development with strong partners and look forward to seeing the fruits of our collective effort shape the future for low-income families living in downtown Monroe."

"The meticulous renovation of the historic Miller-Roy building not only offers invaluable community resources, it provides much-needed low-income housing options in downtown Monroe," said Joshua G. Hollins, Executive Director of the Louisiana Housing Corporation. "The LHC is proud to have contributed \$15 million in low-income housing tax credits and CDBG funds to this project and commends developers Ben Marshall and Michael Echols as well as the United Way on their tremendous work to bring this storied building back to life."

The Miller-Roy building's ribbon cutting is scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 2 at 3:00 p.m. at 1001 DeSiard St. in Monroe.

"As our community gathers to celebrate the reopening of this historic site, my hope is that we look to a prosperous future while also honoring the building's rich history and those who paved the way," Echols said. "To be able to revitalize a once uninhabitable property into a living, breathing community resource hub is something to commemorate."

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**The HOME Coalition** is Northeast Louisiana's designated Continuum of Care, a nonprofit regional planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals. A collaboration of public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders in all 12 parishes, HOME Coalition provides the common ground where we together create and oversee our community's plan to organize and deliver housing and services to end homelessness for thousands each year in NELA.

**Ouachita Workforce Development Board 81** supports a viable and qualified workforce, which sustains current businesses and entices new businesses by fulfilling the needs of a vibrant and expanding employment base. Its mission is to provide policy, guidance, and oversight necessary to facilitate employment, education, and training of the workforce to meet the needs of the business community of Ouachita Parish.

**United Way of Northeast Louisiana** works with volunteers, donors, and other organizations locally to create lasting community change in the areas of education, economic stability, and health. For more information about United Way of Northeast Louisiana, visit [unitedwaynela.org](http://unitedwaynela.org), dial 211 on any landline or mobile phone, a free call 24/7, or text your zip code to 898-211.

**Hunt Capital Partners (HCP)** is the tax credit syndication division of Hunt Companies, Inc. (Hunt). HCP specializes in the sponsorship of Federal and State Low-Income Housing, Historic, and Solar Tax Credit Investments funds. Since its inception in 2010, HCP has raised over \$3 billion in tax credit equity in over 48 proprietary and multi-investor funds. HCP manages almost 760 project partnerships representing over 75,000 homes in 51 states and territories. Founded in 1947, Hunt is a privately held company that invests in businesses focused in the real estate and infrastructure markets. The activities of Hunt's affiliates and investors include investment management, asset management, property management, development, construction, consulting and advisory. For more information on HCP, please visit [www.huntcapitalpartners.com](http://www.huntcapitalpartners.com), or for Hunt, please visit [www.huntcompanies.com](http://www.huntcompanies.com).