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'Green' Film Studio Under Construction in NO

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A dilapidated New Orleans warehouse and surrounding property are being converted into what is being called the nation's first "green" film studio.

Construction has already begun on the new Second Line Stages studio complex in the city's Lower Garden District. The entire studio is being developed from the ground-up to meet LEED's (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) advanced Silver Certification standard.

The first step toward this goal was to clean up contamination at the existing warehouse, which was designated by the EPA and the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality as a "brownfield" site.

The 90,000-square-foot studio will combine new construction with restoration of a historic warehouse located near the recently completed River Garden Housing Community. It will include three sound stages, production offices and a screening theater. Construction is expected to be completed in December.

In addition to becoming the nation's first green-certified studio complex, Second Line Stages will also become Louisiana's first full-service, state-of-the-art media production facility. The project is intended to aid New Orleans' economic recovery by serving the region's fast-growing entertainment production industry.

"This investment is a strategic opportunity to aid the economic recovery of an area still challenged by the effects of Hurricane Katrina," said Deborah La Franchi, co-founder of the \$125 million National New Markets Fund, which is helping to finance the project. "In addition, this project has the opportunity to serve as the model for a nationwide effort to 'green the screen' by making media production more environmentally sustainable.

Second Line Stages is just the latest development project in the GO (Gulf Opportunity) Zone funded with tax credits from National New Markets Fund. Over the past two years, the Fund has helped finance three other projects in Louisiana: The National World War II Museum, Ochsner Baptist Medical Center and the Hammond Square Mall.

Second Line Stages is being built in New Orleans' Lower Garden District, which has a poverty rate of nearly 25%. Based on the most recent census, its residents earn 25% below the area median income, and the unemployment rate is 11.8%.

The new studio will include a training and resource center to help local residents find jobs in the entertainment production industry. The goal is to create a "green collar" workforce that can establish best practices for entertainment production throughout the region. The operators intend to build strong alliances with local community organizations on a range of initiatives including: 1) educational programs for at-risk youth, 2) apprenticeship programs, 3) neighborhood security and safety programs, and 4) skilled employment opportunities for local residents.

"As the nation's first green-from-the-ground-up studio complex, this project has the potential to bring social, environmental and economic benefits to New Orleans while helping spur diversification of the regional economy," added Ms. La Franchi. "New Markets Tax Credits are the critical link that helped make this project possible."

Created in 2000, the New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) Program is administered by the US Treasury Department's Community Development Financial Institutions Fund (CDFI Fund). The NMTC program serves as a catalyst to encourage investment of private capital in urban and rural low-income communities. It allows tax paying investors to receive a credit against federal income taxes for making equity investments in designated Community Development Entities (CDEs). To date, the CDFI Fund has made 364 awards totaling \$19.5 billion in allocation authority.