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Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.) produces this publication to highlight innovations and trends in community development, downtown management and marketing.

## The French Quarter bids for a BID

Originally settled in 1718, New Orleans' historic French Quarter is one of the nation's most remarkable neighborhoods. Protected by strict historic preservation legislation since 1936, the French Quarter offers a visual feast of architecture with styles ranging from 18th century Creole to 19th century Victorian. The French Quarter (or Vieux Carré to the locals) is a city within a city, home to more than 3,000 residents and 1,200 businesses located in 2,000 buildings. It is a world class tourism destination, attracting nearly 10 million visitors each year. And it has a reputation as a premier place to party — Bourbon Street is renowned as a world venue of vice, whether it be Mardi Gras, Southern Decadence or just another Thursday night.

Foreshadowing the challenges of other mixed-use urban entertainment districts, the French Quarter is a victim of its own success. Its popularity overwhelms it with sanitation and safety demands that cannot be met by the New Orleans city government. With nearly 20 registered community organizations, French Quarter stakeholders are divided into business and resident factions that have been harping at each other for years. The result is a dysfunctional paralysis that endangers the very future of a treasured community.

However, all of that is beginning to change. A new coalition of residents, business leaders and government officials

has emerged to take charge of the French Quarter's future.

This latest effort started about two years ago. At that time, visitor exit surveys conducted by the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitor's Bureau (CVB) found that tourists were beginning to sour on the city's star attraction. Top disappointments were the neighborhood's filth and smell, followed by a perceived lack of safety. Concerned about the future of the French Quarter, the CVB pulled together a coalition of businesses and residents to explore options.

The group resurrected an idea that had met several earlier deaths in the French Quarter — a self-taxing district. Known in most cities as a business improvement district, or BID, the district would create an assessment on property to finance enhanced services. The first such district in the U.S. was formed nearly 30 years ago in downtown New Orleans, adjacent to the French Quarter. *(continued on page 2)*



The French Quarter offers a visual feast of architectural styles.

## The French Quarter bids for a BID *(continued from cover)*

Be On The Lookout For These Friendly Faces In: **New Orleans, Louisiana, and Fort Worth, Texas**

The entire firm, with spouses in tow, is off to the International Downtown Association Spring Conference

in New Orleans, April 27 through 29. Look for us at the

"French Quarter – Birth of a BID" workshop scheduled for Sunday morning, April 28.

Brad will be leading a session on "The Fundamentals of BIDs" at the National Town Meeting on Main Street in Fort Worth on Tuesday morning, April 9.



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Progressive Urban Management Associates was hired in early 2001 by the New Orleans hospitality industry to assist the French Quarter community in exploring the creation of the improvement district. It is without a doubt the most challenging assignment we have undertaken. During the first year of work, a business plan has been developed for a potential Vieux Carré Improvement District, the result of a community engagement process that included input from more than 800 residents, property owners and civic leaders.

Through this process we found a neighborhood characterized by skepticism, angst and irony. A "triangle of distrust" exists between residents, businesses and local government. Residents view the tourism business as the latest in a series of invasions that go back more than 250 years, from the Spaniards to the Americans to General Sherman. Many residents blame tourism for an onslaught of trash and nuisance crimes that has degraded the French Quarter's quality of life. Meanwhile, businesses view the residents with general ambivalence. Both groups deeply distrust a local government that struggles to deliver basic services in a city with formidable social challenges.

Despite these divisions, both residents and businesses expressed identical priorities for improving the French Quarter. Top needs are enhanced sanitation, public safety and cosmetic capital improvements, including sidewalk repair and public restrooms.

To overcome the atmosphere of fragmentation and distrust, the following principles guided the creation of the business plan:

- Keep it simple. The improvement district should aim to tackle only the top common priorities.
- Make it fair. Commercial property owners should pay substantially more than residents.
- Make it accountable. The district's governing board should provide meaningful representation for all groups, yet require consensus-based decision-making. In addition, government must document and commit to maintain a base level of existing services to ensure that improvement district services enhance, as oppose to replace, existing City services.

We learned that "how" is more important than "what" in the French Quarter. There is no tradition of a success-

ful public/private partnership involving residents, businesses and government.

To demonstrate how an improvement district could work, a pilot program, financed by the New Orleans hospitality industry, was launched in February. The Vieux Carré Alliance (VCA), a new non-profit organization, was formed to manage the program. The VCA board of directors has nine residents, nine businesses and four elected officials. Seventy-five per cent approval is necessary for major policy decisions, requiring the different interest groups to reach consensus. Pilot program services include steam cleaning of sidewalks and a sanitation SWAT team that will provide on-call response to unusual and non-recurring maintenance problems. Philadelphia-based Service Group Inc. is providing the services.

Meanwhile, the business plan for the Vieux Carré Improvement District is moving along the peculiar Louisiana legislative process. First, state legislation must be adopted creating the authority for the French Quarter to form an improvement district. Next, respecting the state constitution, a vote among registered voters residing in the district will be required to formally establish the district and its taxing structure. The vote may occur in the fall, at the earliest.

The current iteration of the business plan for the Vieux Carré Improvement District provides for an annual \$2.27 million budget financed by a tiered assessment structure. The proposed work program includes enhanced sanitation services, cadets to enforce nuisance crimes and funds for cosmetic capital improvements. The VCA would govern the district and manage its services.

The pilot program, which could make or break the improvement district, is being closely watched by thousands of eyes. There were a handful of complaints as the program worked out kinks during its first week, to which VCA president and resident activist Lyn Reed responded, "We have about 275 years of grime on the sidewalks. Surely we deserve more than two weeks to show positive impact?"

If they can pull it off, the French Quarter will create a new partnership that will unify and empower the community in a completely new way – a foundation for keeping this unique neighborhood vital for the next 275 years.

"We have about 275 years of grime on the sidewalks. Surely we deserve more than two weeks to show positive impact?"

### P.U.M.A. Alumni News

Christian Cherek, the original "pumadame," is expecting the birth of her first child in April. Christian serves as the executive director of the Cheyenne Downtown Development Authority. Call or email Christian with congratulations at 307-433-9731 or cbcherek@aol.com.

Learn more about the French Quarter improvement district effort at the International Downtown Association spring conference in New Orleans, April 27 to 29. For a copy of the Vieux Carré Improvement District business plan, contact Brad Segal at 303-628-5554 or pumaman@ix.netcom.com.



In cooperation with the International Downtown Association (IDA), P.U.M.A. recently completed a downtown summit and board development workshop to break an ongoing cycle of organizational paralysis in **Tucson, Arizona**. The private sector has limited influence in steering downtown development efforts, a result of fragmented organizations with relatively narrow agendas. To help energize and guide these groups toward a more unified approach, more than 250 property owners, businesses and community leaders attended a "Downtown Activation Panel" with speakers representing successful downtown development efforts in Albuquerque and Tempe. On the following day, more than 60 board members from four major downtown groups participated in a board development workshop. For the first time in recent history, the groups agreed to a common downtown vision and a short-term collaborative work program. For more information, contact John Jones at the City of Tucson, 520-791-5580.

**Thornton, Colorado**, now has a game-plan for improving the historic Eastlake business district. A rapidly growing suburban community north of Denver, Thornton was seeking a strategy that could both preserve Eastlake's unique character and prepare it for future development along a designated commuter rail line. P.U.M.A. completed a Market-Based Plan, resulting in a niche strategy that positions Eastlake as "an historical enclave – an oasis of authenticity, intimacy and agricultural heritage." Specific tactics and sequencing are provided in the plan for environmental improvements, business development, regulatory issues and joint development options. Contact Jay Wolffarth at the City of Thornton, 303-538-7693.

## AIRPLANE READING

*A pleasant by-product of our travel schedule is that we get to read a lot. Here we share the best...*

**Islam**  
**A Short History**  
*Karen Armstrong, 2000*

After September 11, we at PUMA became painfully aware just how scant our knowledge of Islam really is, and thought we should make an attempt to learn more. Brad picked up *Islam-A Short History* and it has since made the rounds in our office. This book gives texture and personality to Islam in its various iterations throughout history. The author explains the central tenet of Islam is "to create a just community in which all members, even the most weak and vulnerable are treated with absolute respect." She goes on to illustrate that Islam is built upon the very notion that there is an inextricable, fundamental relationship between politics and religion – if political leaders are just, they are carrying out a Divine purpose. This short history - 187 pages, is a quick and worthwhile read.

**Have a Plan And Make the Most of Arts and Culture**  
*Nancy Moses, Public Management, December 2001*

Today cultural attractions are much more than amenities – they are economic development tools. As more people move into downtowns, arts and cultural attractions are playing a crucial role in neighborhood revitalization. This article provides four basic strategies for municipalities to build cultural assets – redeveloping existing buildings into cultural venues, creating new cultural entities such as museums, inviting major institutions to set up satellite operations, and holding special events that promote regional identity. A key to understanding strategic cultural investments: know your market! As the author states, "cultural organizations can become cultural assets useful in spurring downtown development, attracting new residents and businesses, and transforming a community into a thriving tourist destination."

### EDGEWATER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

With a colorful history dating back more than 100 years, Edgewater is a community on the western border of Denver that retains a distinctive small town atmosphere in the midst of a sprawling metropolitan area. Over the past several years, Edgewater has seen its commercial sales tax base erode, despite the regional growth and prosperity of the late 1990s. To reverse this trend, the City of Edgewater engaged P.U.M.A. and Szymanski/Ray to complete the community's first economic development plan. We completed an economic profile, retail leakage analysis and extensive community interviews to develop strategies and tactics for each of its four distinct commercial districts. These districts include a regional "big box" shopping center, a traditional Main Street, a state highway corridor and an abandoned neighborhood grocery store. We are currently working with Edgewater city officials to implement the plan. For more information, contact Anna at 303-628-5558 or [pumajones@ix.netcom.com](mailto:pumajones@ix.netcom.com).



In each issue of Progressive Urban Management, we highlight partners and clients who have been influential in our success: **Arnold Ray** is a household name in Denver area real estate circles, but we just had the privilege of meeting Arne over the past year. Arne has an extensive background in real estate development and analysis, including a past stint with Chicago's Real Estate Research Corporation. His expertise provides a critical reality check in creating revitalization strategies – a quality that we found invaluable in the Edgewater Economic Development Plan. Besides, we just have fun working with the guy! We hope that Arne will humor us and continue to collaborate on future projects.

## New Products — Community-Based Economic Development

In a time of economic uncertainty, we are finding more demand for our community-based economic development services, including market-based plans for downtowns, business districts and organizations. These plans have several common attributes:

- A competitive analysis that explores a variety of market factors.
- Extensive community outreach to identify goals and expectations.
- Niche strategies that merge community aspirations with the reality of the marketplace.
- Pragmatic tactics for implementation.
- Organizational strategies to ensure long-term sustainability.

We value results. While we take great pride in our plans, we take greater satisfaction in being part of a process that leads to tangible and visible improvements in a community. Our philosophy is rooted in a belief that the planning process itself should create the foundation for implementation – both in carrying a sound market-basis and in developing a supportive constituency to carry out recommendations.

For more information on community-based economic development, contact Brad, Anna or Pamela.



## ABOUT P.U.M.A.

**P**rogressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.) is a consulting firm providing management, marketing and financial services to advance downtown and community development. The firm has provided services to more than 100 clients in 22 states, the District of Columbia, Canada and Jamaica. Clients include downtown management organizations, local governments, community development corporations and private firms.

### Specialties include:

- Forming, expanding or renewing business improvement districts
- Strategic planning for downtown management organizations
- Creating market-based downtown plans
- Undertaking market research, business planning and project feasibility analysis

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