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**Volunteers of America Announces Plans to Develop Programs to Provide Healthy Meals, Job Training and Housing**

*Program to be housed in restored Historic Cotton Press and Lykes Steamship buildings*

*New Orleans, LA (October 2, 2012)* – Volunteers of America Greater New Orleans today announced the renovation of the Centennial Cotton Press building, which will house the nonprofit’s newest venture, the Fresh and Healthy Kitchen and commercial spaces, and the adjacent Lykes Steamship building, which will be converted to rental apartments. Volunteers of America described plans for the state-of-the-art complex during today’s groundbreaking at 1770 Tchoupitoulas St.

This initiative supports local economic development; invests in the Tchoupitoulas corridor revitalization; supports local and state industry sectors; spurs long term job creation; and creates lifestyle changes consistent with the mission of Volunteers of America.

**Fresh and Healthy Food/Job Training**

The program initially plans to contract with local schools to deliver wholesome school lunches and snacks, giving schools the opportunity to provide fresh foods. Plans may also include an urban garden.

Meals will be prepared by members of the culinary arts training program that will operate in conjunction with the Fresh and Healthy Kitchen. Volunteers of America plans to employ more than 125 trainees in the program, including veterans served by its Veterans Transitional Housing program. Participants will be educated in culinary arts and food service to prepare for new careers in the hospitality industry.

“Good food is such a vital part of our culture in New Orleans,” said Volunteers of America President and CEO Jim LeBlanc. “We want to make sure children get fresh, nutritious food. Our goal is to use this program to meet critical community needs such as fighting childhood obesity and job training for the unemployed.”

**Housing**

In addition to the fresh food commercial kitchen, apartments in the Lykes Steamship building will provide 52 unique apartments in a mix of studio, one and two-bedroom units, geared for residents who work in downtown New Orleans. The apartments are being built in accordance with both Enterprise Green Communities Criteria and U.S. Green Building Council LEED Homes standards.

This development is part of a larger mission by Volunteers of America to create 1,050 housing units for working families to replace the homes lost to Hurricane Katrina.

**Financing**

Enterprise Community Investment, Inc. and Volunteers of America National Services raised $18.5 million of public and private financing through the New Markets Tax Credit Program to fund the development. U.S. Bancorp Community Development Corporation, the community investment subsidiary of U.S. Bank, provided more than $7.9 million of New Markets and Historic Tax Credit equity. A $3.2 million permanent loan, as well as bridge financing, was provided by Iberia Bank. The balance of project costs were funded by a $2.5 million loan and $1 million grant from the State of Louisiana Office of Community Development, $2.6 million in state historic tax credit proceeds from Tax Credit Capital, LLC, as well as private grants from the Major League Baseball Players Trust, the Greater New Orleans Foundation, the Methodist Health Foundation and the Entergy Charitable Foundation.

 “This project will have it all -- affordable and attractive housing, fresh and healthy meals, job training in a high-demand industry, retail and warehouse space, all of which will contribute to the ongoing economic recovery of the area,” said Pat Forbes, Executive Director of the State of Louisiana Office of Community Development.

As cited by The Louisiana Department of Culture Recreation and Tourism, the 1700 block of Tchoupitoulas was originally developed in 1857 as a processing facility for the thriving cotton industry, and the Centennial Cotton Press Building was constructed between 1885 and 1895. The area saw expansion in the mid-twentieth century as the Port of New Orleans experienced a commercial resurgence. The Lykes Steamship Company operated on the site since 1937, and constructed its office building in 1949. As part of this development, the entire block has been designated the Lykes Steamship Historic District by the National Park Service.

Fresh and Healthy Food and residential housing is a partnership with the Renaissance Neighborhood Redevelopment Corporation (RDNC), a subsidiary of Volunteers of America. The Kitchen plans to begin serving schools for the fall 2013 semester.

*Volunteers of America is a national, nonprofit, faith-based organization dedicated to helping those in need rebuild their lives and reach their full potential.  Since 1896, our ministry of service has supported and empowered America's most vulnerable groups, including at-risk youth, the frail elderly, men returning from prison, people with disabilities, and those recovering from addictions. Our work touches the mind, body, heart-and ultimately the spirit-of those we serve, integrating our deep compassion with highly effective programs and services.*

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