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## Success Stories

### **Jimmy Robinson: Musician, Incubator and Advocate**

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By Ethan Ellestad



Musician Jimmy Robinson has received much attention and many accolades for his groundbreaking guitar work, both as a solo artist and with groups Woodenhead and Twangorama. Less well known, however, is his support and advocacy for the Lafitte Greenway. His affiliation with the area began nearly thirty years ago, when Robinson began using part of the massive warehouse on the 2900 block of Lafitte St. as a rehearsal space. A few years later, an opportunity arose for him to purchase the building, which he quickly took. Since then, he has not looked back.

Originally the National Sash and Door Company, the structure was constructed in the late 1800's to serve as a manufacturing plant for doors, windows, cabinetry and other wooden components. It also served as a lumberyard. For a company heavily reliant on shipping, the location next to the then still existing Carondelet Canal was ideal. However, the first few decades of the twentieth century were not kind to the area, leading to the disappearance of National Sash and Door as well as the filling in of the Carondelet Canal. Despite this, the building has not only remained, but under Robinson's stewardship, it has flourished, as it now houses close to 45 tenants—a mixture of small businesses, artist's studios and rehearsal space for musicians.

One of these businesses, Royal Paper and Box Inc., has been a presence in the building almost as long as Robinson has. Specializing in providing packaging materials for both

the retail and wholesale markets, Royal Paper and Box has spent roughly twenty-six of its forty nine years at 2919 Lafitte St. on the warehouse's ground floor. Co-owner Joann Gravolet finds the space ideal for many reasons. "We're ten minutes from Metairie Road and five minutes from the Quarter. Parking is great and Jimmy is the ideal landlord."

Just down from Royal Paper and Box, you will find Arthur Mintz, joined by his collaborators Jacques and Renee Duffoure, hard at work constructing puppets and sets for an adaptation of Roald Dahl's 'The Fantastic Mr. Fox'. Funded by the Contemporary Arts Center, the show is set to open November 26, 2009. Though their project is short-term—they began work in August and have to be finished in November—the trio was universal in their enthusiasm for the Greenway. Jacques Duffoure even suggested it would be great to see a restored waterway as part of the design, allowing people to once again travel from Lake Pontchartrain to the French Quarter by boat.

With over 20 years of work invested in the block-long warehouse, Robinson is pleased to see renewed interest in the area. In years past, parts of the Lafitte Corridor were almost derelict, serving as dumping ground for garbage, outdated machinery, and even the occasional stolen car. Now, with the impending construction of the Greenway, instead of blight, he sees opportunity. New Orleans' vibrant music and arts scene provides an almost endless stream of prospective tenants in need of studio and rehearsal space. Coupled with the recently approved Cultural Products District designation, the Greenway will provide a boon not only to Robinson and his tenants, but also the city as a whole. "Connecting the French Quarter with City Park would be a great thing for a lot of people," Robinson says.