



Everything New Orleans

## Hikers along the Lafitte Corridor will trace the path of a soon-to-be greenway

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By **Sheila Stroup, The Times-Picayune**

If you want to see New Orleans in a whole new way, "Hike the Lafitte Corridor" on Saturday. The 3.1-mile walk through what was once a railroad line and portage canal is about both the city's past and its future.



RUSTY COSTANZA / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

Two hikers walk on a railroad track at the end of the Lafitte Corridor.

The annual trek, hosted by Friends of Lafitte Corridor, has some new features this year. Activities will be set up at stops along the route, and instead of going in one big group, trained ambassadors will lead small groups of hikers and answer questions about the area's history and the soon-to-be-developed linear park that will be a wonderful addition to New Orleans.

"The proposed greenway is a way to revitalize the entire corridor," said Erica Normand, an FOLC board member.

Normand and two Greenway ambassadors gave me a preview of the hike on Monday.

The ambassadors, Conor Monahan, 24, and Rebecca Marshburn, 23, are newcomers to New Orleans.

They moved here from California pretty much sight unseen. Monahan had never been to the Crescent City, and Marshburn had visited once. They live on Frenchmen Street and like being able to walk everywhere.

"We wanted to move someplace diverse and culturally significant," Monahan said. "New Orleans is incredible. There's just this amazing potpourri of history here."

We talked about some of that history as we headed north from Basin Street on what is mostly a weedy, trash-strewn abandoned railroad right-of-way. It helped to envision what the area will become.

"It's really exciting when we walk along here to think about how good this space could be for families,"

Marshburn said.



The corridor links these historic neighborhoods: The French Quarter, Treme, Mid-City, Faubourg St. John, City Park and Lakeview.

Bayou St. John, which intersects the corridor at Jefferson Davis Parkway, is the historical entry to New Orleans from Lake Pontchartrain and was connected to the French Quarter by the Carondelet Canal. A turning basin behind the Vieux Carre gave Basin Street its name.

What was once a bustling area filled with boat traffic, and later rail traffic (trains still serve Masonry Products along the route), will soon be reborn as a trail for walkers, runners and cyclists. It will be a place where moms can walk their babies in strollers. It will provide a direct route from Delgado Community College for students who want to travel downtown by bicycle. It will become a vital link to the many bike paths around the city for cyclists who want to pedal to work or school or ride for fun and exercise.

"But it's not just going to be a greenway for the public," Normand said. "All the houses along the corridor are going to benefit from it."

During our hike, we met with Daniel Samuels, a board member and former president of the Friends of Lafitte Corridor, the advocacy group that formed after Hurricane Katrina and has been pushing for development of the greenway.

Samuels, a Mid-City architect, says plans to redevelop the area go back to 1976.

"It's been obvious for many years that this would be a great thing for the city," he said.

The current project, which will be paid for with federal Community Development Block Grant money and other grants, was held up near the end of the Nagin administration by some glitches, but now "It's a go."

"The city is close to signing a contract," he said.

Then phase one of the construction -- the basic path and green-space rehabilitation -- will begin.

What will be included beyond those basics is yet to be decided.

"The whole key to the success of this project is people getting involved and helping to shape it," Samuels said. "We need to get folks involved when it starts, which we hope is very soon."

That's one of the reasons for the hike: To let people in the neighborhoods surrounding the corridor know what's happening and get their input.

"Saving this land and bringing it back to life as a public open space amenity could be a strategy for restoring these neighborhoods and giving younger people a reason to come back to them," Samuels said.

He names the ways the greenway can enhance New Orleans: It will be an active transit route. It will be a way to improve public health through outdoor recreation. It will provide economic development. It will be a way to build a more sustainable city. And it will be a way to show tourists the history of this incredible place.

"We hope that one day it will be a cultural heritage trail," he said. "It will be a way to get people out of the French Quarter and into the heart of the city."

## Hike the Lafitte Corridor

**What:** A 3.1-mile walk, hosted by Friends of Lafitte Corridor, along the route of a proposed greenway corridor linking the French Quarter, Tremé, Mid-City, Faubourg St. John, City Park and Lakeview. Playworks, playNOLA and Mid-City Volleyball will host activities along the way. Lunch, provided by Parkway Bakery, will be served at Massey's Professional Outfitters on Carrollton Avenue. A misting tent will be set up next to Bud's Broiler near the end of the hike. Rides back to the starting point will be provided at the end and at stops along the way.

**When:** Saturday, beginning at Basin Street and ending at Canal Boulevard. Meet at 10 a.m. on the Orleans Avenue side of Armstrong Park. The Mahalia Jackson Theater lot will be open for free parking. Bike valet parking will be provided by the New Orleans Metro Bicycle Coalition.

**Cost:** Free, and children are welcome, but you're encouraged to register ahead of time.

**Info:** [www.folc-nola.org](http://www.folc-nola.org)

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***Sheila Stroup's column appears Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday in Living. She can be reached at [sstroup@timespicayune.com](mailto:sstroup@timespicayune.com) or 985.898.4831. Comment and read more at [NOLA.com/living](http://NOLA.com/living).***

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