German Schoolhouse Redevelopment for US Heritage Powersports
The interior of the German Schoolhouse envisioned as a production floor for Von Dutch Custom Choppers (US-HP).
THE GERMAN SCHOOLHOUSE

The German Schoolhouse redevelopment project is a vision of the Gulf Coast Housing Partnership and Demetri Melekos, founder of US Heritage Powersports, a motorcycle production and export company. The renovation of the German Schoolhouse into a facility for the assembly of Von Dutch Custom Choppers brings jobs, education and industry into the city of New Orleans.

Located at 1831 Polymnia Street in New Orleans’ Central City neighborhood, the German Schoolhouse is a three story brick warehouse with high ceilings, cast iron columns, and an open floor plan. Beautifully ornamented but long abandoned, the building is one of several local remnants of the bustling commercial corridor that once defined this historic neighborhood along Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, formerly Dryades Street.

In addition to housing the US-HP production floor, the German Schoolhouse has ample room to accommodate a variety of uses, including a storefront retail space.

Gulf Coast Housing Partnership is a local non-profit developer dedicated to the revitalization of the Gulf Coast region, and has spearheaded the recent push to redevelop OC Haley Boulevard.
VON DUTCH AND US-HP

Von Dutch is the professional name of the late Kenneth Howard, California’s legendary hot-rod “Kustom Kulture” king, credited with being the first to paint stripes and flames on cars and motorcycles in the 40’s and 50’s. The Von Dutch brand specializes in an internationally recognized aesthetic of American freedom, rebellion and individualism. Under the guidance of Demetri Melekos and US Heritage Powersports, the Von Dutch custom chopper will be taken to international emerging markets and sold as an icon of the American lifestyle. The German Schoolhouse facility is part of that vision, bringing the assembly of these sophisticated, beautiful machines into the urban center of New Orleans, to be created by locally trained Louisiana residents.

As a registered Benefit Corporation (B Corp), US-HP is held to high standards of social responsibility. US-HP intends for the German Schoolhouse space to become a focal point of the Central City community, adding to the tenant variety along the Oretha Castle Haley commercial corridor and engendering local pride in the production of these highly finished and uniquely designed custom choppers. The assembly floor becomes a stage for the production of a cultural icon and status symbol, as well as a learning opportunity for local youth who are attracted to the motorcycle culture and interested in pursuing a career in automotive mechanics.
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

“COURSE CHOICE”
$970
PER STUDENT

US - HP
MECHANICAL ARTS & SCIENCES TRAINING

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

LOUISIANA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

“FAST START”
$3500
PER STUDENT

US - HP
DELCADO AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM

ASSOCIATES DEGREE

EMPLOYMENT
As part of his plan to bring vocational training and education to New Orleans, Demetri Melekos and US Heritage Powersports have partnered with Delgado Community College to “reinvent shop class.” Together, the two will begin training students in the art of automotive mechanics beginning as early as high school. Utilizing the Course Choice program launched by the Louisiana Department of Education in 2013, US-HP and Delgado will begin providing advanced-placement courses in basic mechanical arts and sciences to junior and senior level high school students. Course Choice provides $970 per student enrolled in college-preparatory and career training courses through this program, through which students can earn both high school and college credit.

If students choose to continue from high school into college at Delgado using credits already attained through the Course Choice program, there will be a scholarship available to them set up through US-HP and the Louisiana Economic Development “Fast Track” program. Fast Track gives companies $3500 per employee to assist with costs associated with relocating businesses from out of state into Louisiana. Through an agreement with US-HP, these funds will instead be used to train Louisiana residents for employee positions.

The US-HP/Delgado partnership gives students a unique opportunity to get hands-on training in assembly, welding and painting through the production of a beautiful and sophisticated product. Training will take place through a combination of class types, including online and traditional classroom learning, as well as at the shop on site at Delgado and, eventually, using the classroom and shop facilities at the renovated German Schoolhouse in Central City.
The Central City stretch of Dryades Street, now Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, was once a premier shopping district for the surrounding German, Jewish, Irish, and African American communities, and Kaufman’s Department Store was at its heart. The commercial anchor at 1700-12 Dryades, which sold everything from “a needle to an anchor” for close to a century, owned and occupied nearly the entire block before shutting its doors in 1962. The two adjoined three-story brick buildings at 1831 Polymnia Street, known in the neighborhood as the German Schoolhouse, were actually constructed in 1889 as a retail annex and warehouse for Kaufman’s growing empire.

In 1878, Charles A. Kaufman and Marks Isaacs opened for business in three two-story modified storefronts at the corner of Dryades and Euterpe streets. Kaufman & Isaacs’ initial success as a dry goods emporium soon required it to expand, and in December 1888 the company purchased a lot at 1831 Polymnia Street that backed onto the rear of its store. At that time the stretch of Polymnia Street between Dryades and Baronne was residential, with modest houses and a small, detached one-story private school at the rear of 1829 Polymnia. The school, according to the 1885 city directory, was run by a Mrs. Dorothea Jackson and may have served the neighborhood’s large German community, which is perhaps the source of the warehouses’ local nickname.
Soon after buying the Polymnia Street lot, Kaufman & Isaacs, according to a June 1889 Times-Picayune article, constructed a “handsome three-story brick structure, measuring 32x150 feet, joined to the rear portion of their present building…. The Polymnia Street annex will be handsomely embellished; colored, frosted, and stained glass will adorn the façade; new banquette will be laid; and every modern convenience afforded customers and patrons.”¹ One of those conveniences was an elevator located just beyond the doors of the dedicated customer entrance, which was protected by an overhang. But the growing business required still more room, and a few years after the annex’s grand opening, Kaufman & Isaacs purchased the neighboring lot at 1829 Polymnia, where Mrs. Jackson’s school was located, and converted the school building into additional warehouse space.

Kaufman & Isaacs’ business, which became known as “The Big Store,” was booming. A Times-Picayune feature explains the nature of its success:

The “Big Store” was once the place where a thickly settled neighboring population made their purchases. Its reputation for honesty and fair dealing, for quality and prices, growing apace, it built up a much larger circle of patronage…It was in this manner that the establishment of Kaufman & Isaacs grew from the emporium of a neighborhood to be the “Big Store” of a great city.²

The Big Store was soon to get bigger. The company purchased the lot next to the school-turned-warehouse, 1825 Polymnia, in 1898, two adjacent lots on Euterpe Street in 1901, and both 1710 Dryades and the German Methodist Episcopal Church in 1905.9 Kaufman tore down the two newly acquired Dryades properties and in their place erected a grand, three-story flagship next door to the original Kaufman & Isaacs store, which the company continued to occupy. It is likely that during this building campaign Kaufman’s also demolished the school and dwelling at 1829 Polymnia and added the second, less ornamented brick warehouse, which began as a two-story building; the third story was added in the 1910s. The company also constructed a one-story warehouse next door at 1825 Polymnia.

Less than twenty years later, Kaufman’s replaced its one-story warehouse with a new one-story L-shaped annex, or “arcade,” that had customer entrances on both Polymnia and Baronne streets and wrapped around the recently built Polymnia Street substation on the corner. Under new ownership after Charles A. Kaufman’s death in 1917, the store had purchased the three lots in 1925 and opened its new arcade to great fanfare the following year.

When the Great Depression struck, Kaufman’s began its decline, leasing its buildings and ultimately closing its doors permanently in 1962. The German Schoolhouse, along with the flagship store on Dryades (now Oretha Castle Haley) are the two most intact remnants of the former “Big Store.”

¹. “Another Addition,” The Times-Picayune, June 23, 1889.
². “The Big Store Earns the Name,” The Times-Picayune, September 1, 1897.
Kaufman & Isaacs purchase the site of the future German Schoolhouse in 1888 and immediately construct one half of the current building, a handsome warehouse on Polymnia Street.

By 1905 the company has purchased more properties on Polymnia and Dryades, and has built large a large new flagship on Dryades. The German Schoolhouse building is expanded, and a one-story warehouse built next to it.

In 1925 Kaufman’s replaces its one-story warehouse with a new one-story L-shaped annex, or “arcade,” with customer entrances on both Polymnia and Baronne streets and wrapping around the recently built Polymnia Street substation on the corner.
By the late 1940s, Kaufman’s has leased all but its Dryades Street flagship store and the German Schoolhouse building to other businesses. In 1961, the company sells all of its property and closes permanently one year later.

From the 1960s through the present day, the German Schoolhouse property changes hands multiple times. Modifications are made to accommodate light industrial use, including large garage door openings punched through the Polymnia facade. The building falls into disuse in the 1990s.
Above (Left): Former Kaufman’s Flagship store, 1712 Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard. Currently home to the Ashé Cultural Arts Center.

Above (Right): Detail of stone façade on the former Kaufman’s flagship store, built around 1905.

Left: Former Polymnia Street substation on the Felicity Triangle, with the Muses Apartment Homes (completed in 2010) in the background.
Handelman’s, another former department store, was located two blocks from Kaufman’s and permanently closed its doors in the 1950s. The building that remains has been converted to apartments, while its grand facade and awning are further reminders of the boulevard’s commercial past. Smaller buildings on OC Haley built in the early 20th century followed suit with embellished brick and stone façades.
Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard

Due in large part to the efforts of the Gulf Coast Housing Partnership and other local developers, the Oretha Castle Haley commercial corridor has experienced a burst of redevelopment and revitalization projects within the last several years, and has many scheduled to come.

The German Schoolhouse redevelopment project will be among a group of new cultural attractions in the neighborhood including the Southern Food and Beverage Museum and the future home of the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra, making the Von Dutch Custom Choppers assembly floor a potential destination for visitors interested in witnessing the creation of this cultural icon.

Scenes from Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard (left to right): Zeitgeist Theater, the Franz building, Café Reconcile, The Bank Architectural Salvage, the Youth Empowerment Project, Young Leadership Council
EXISTING FLOORPLANS

THIRD FLOOR
SCALE 1/32" = 1'-0"

62'
Building Renovation

The following design proposals reflect the possible spatial configurations of the assembly floor for Von Dutch Custom Choppers as well as of the second and third floor, which house the offices of US-HP and additional, rentable office space. The ground floor street-front is occupied by retail space, providing much needed street life to Polymnia, advantageously located between OC Haley and the Muses Apartments.

Requirements for the US-HP assembly floor include lift stations for mechanical work, a welding bench, a paint booth and a large free area for crating finished choppers. Additionally, storage space must be provided for crated choppers awaiting shipment.

The rendering (left) reflects the building façade restored to its original, historical configuration.

The site plan (right) depicts the ground floor plan as well as the improved parking layout planned by Gulf Coast Housing Partnership.
This spatial configuration dedicates almost the entire front third of the building to a large retail space and chopper showroom area. Access is provided through the retail space to the assembly floor, via a side gallery from which a student can view the mechanics or a visitor can see the choppers left on lifts after hours. Large garage doors along the side aisle make it possible for equipment to easily be brought into or out of the building. Storage for crated choppers is provided on the ground floor, for ease of loading for shipping. Upper floors are accessed through a stair and elevator located in a separate entryway on Polymnia. Storage for parts and the US-HP headquarters, including offices, research & development space, and a classroom are all located on the second floor. The third floor is left an open plan, potentially for additional office space, such as a business incubator.
SCHEME 2

This spatial configuration dedicates half of the Polymnia street frontage to retail space, and the other half to a storage and receiving area through which parts and crated choppers can be brought through from the assembly floor. Large garage doors along the side of the assembly floor make it possible for equipment to easily be brought into or out of the building, and allow the assembly floor to be visible from or open to the street. Upper floors are accessed via a stair and elevator located in a separate entryway on Polymnia. Storage for parts and the US-HP headquarters, including offices, research & development space, and a classroom are all located on the second floor. The third floor is left an open plan, potentially for additional office space, such as a business incubator.
This spatial configuration dedicates the whole of the Polymnia street frontage to retail space. Storage for crated choppers is provided on the assembly floor in a 40 ft shipping container which can be removed from the building, loaded on a truck, and replaced with an empty container. A special mechanism is necessary to remove the shipping container from the building. Large garage doors along the side of the assembly floor make it possible for equipment to easily be brought in or out of the building, and allow the assembly floor to be visible from or open to the street. Upper floors are accessed via a stair and elevator located in a separate entryway on Polymnia. Storage for parts and the US-HP headquarters, including offices, research & development space, and a classroom are all located on the second floor. The third floor is divided into residential units, with skylights to provide daylight to the rear apartments.
## SPACE REQUIREMENTS FOR CHOPPERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRATING AREA</th>
<th>WELDING STATION</th>
<th>PAINT BOOTH</th>
<th>ASSEMBLY STATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20' x 20' estimate</td>
<td>30&quot; x 60&quot; estimate Minimum 3' 0&quot; aisle</td>
<td>12' 6&quot; x 10' estimate Must be located along exterior wall</td>
<td>20' x 10' estimate Includes table extensions and minimum 3' 0&quot; aisle on all sides</td>
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</tbody>
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![Crating area diagram](image1)

![Welding station diagram](image2)

![Paint booth diagram](image3)

![Assembly station diagram](image4)
Gulf Coast Housing Partnership (GCHP)

US Heritage Powersports (USHP)

Tulane City Center (TCC)

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