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Renovation Report: Gates of Prayer invests $6M to reimagine, expand Metairie campus

Tommy Santora (mailto:?subject=Renovation Report: Gates of Prayer invests $6M to reimagine, expand Metairie campus&body=Project description: Congregation Gates of Prayer in Metairie has completed a $6 million investment in its West Esplanade Avenue campus. New additions include a 20,000-square-foot prayer garden and amenity courtyard with... You can read the content in details following link https%3A%2F%2Fneworleanscitybusiness.com%2Fblog%2F2026%2F04%2F24%2Fgates-of-prayer-metairie-6m-campus-renovation%2F) // April 24, 2026 // 6 Minute Read

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KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- $6 million renovation modernizes historic Metairie synagogue campus
- New 20,000-square-foot prayer garden (https://neworleanscitybusiness.com/blog/tag/prayer-garden/) and outdoor courtyard added
- Open-air “moadon” creative arts center expands programming space
- Interior upgrades improve sanctuary, accessibility and preschool areas

Project description: Congregation Gates of Prayer (https://neworleanscitybusiness.com/blog/tag/congregation-gates-of-prayer/) in Metairie has completed a $6 million investment in its West Esplanade Avenue (https://neworleanscitybusiness.com/blog/tag/west-esplanade-avenue/) campus. New additions include a 20,000-square-foot prayer garden and amenity courtyard with walking paths and outdoor space for seasonal events, and a covered, open-air creative arts center known as a moadon. Further improvements include approximately 10,000 square feet of interior renovations, upgraded sanctuary lighting, temple renovations, improved accessibility and revitalized education spaces for the preschool.

Location: 4000 West Esplanade Avenue, Metairie
Cost: $6 million
Start date: Mid 2025
Completion date: March 2026
Owner: Congregation Gates of Prayer
General Contractor: Perrier Esquerre Contractors, LLC
Architect: Colectivo

The oldest ongoing congregation in Greater New Orleans is enjoying a massive makeover and modernization to its Metairie campus. Congregation Gates of Prayer — a robust and vibrant Reform Jewish synagogue established in 1850 and located on West Esplanade Avenue since the 1970s — has invested approximately $6 million to expand and renovate its property.

New additions include a 20,000-square-foot prayer garden and amenity courtyard with walking paths and outdoor space for seasonal events, and a covered, open-air creative arts center known as a moadon. Further improvements include approximately 10,000 square feet of interior renovations, upgraded sanctuary lighting, temple renovations, improved accessibility and revitalized preschool education spaces.

“Congregation Gates of Prayer has always evolved to meet the needs of our community, and this renovation carries that tradition forward by creating spaces that support worship, education, interfaith connection and everyday community life,” said Jen Merryman, executive director of Congregation Gates of Prayer. “These new and renovated spaces are more welcoming, more functional and better connected, and it has been incredibly rewarding to see our members embrace them as an extension of both our communal and spiritual life.”

St. Rose-based Perrier Esquerré Contractors **(https://neworleanscitybusiness.com/blog/tag/perrier-esquerre-contractors/)** LLC and New Orleans-based architecture firm Colectivo teamed up on the renovation. From the start, the project was built on open communication, said Keith Esquerré, principal and director of field operations at Perrier Esquerré Contractors.

“We worked hand in hand with the executive director, the construction committee, and the design team to align on budget and timeline, and that shared commitment carried us through every phase of construction — especially as we worked around the congregation’s ongoing schedule,” Esquerré said. “A few late nights and long weekends made sure the interior renovation and exterior addition were completed and ready for the facility’s planned events.”

The project was fully funded by the congregation through a capital campaign that raised $10 million, exceeding its $6 million goal by $4 million. Merryman said the remaining funds will help sustain and operate the new spaces and support future preschool renovations. Congregation Gates of Prayer serves more than 400 member families and enrolls more than 50 students of all faith backgrounds in its preschool.

“The fact that our congregation ultimately raised $10 million says so much about how strongly our members believed in the new vision of our campus. They understood that this was an investment not only in the building, but in the future of our community,” Merryman said. “We wanted to do more than just build something new — we wanted to make sure we could sustain it for future generations. The success of the campaign put us in a position to invest in these spaces while also maintaining them responsibly for years to come.”

A major feature of the renovation is the new courtyard and garden, which Merryman described as the “jewel” of the project.

The space transformed an underused corner at West Esplanade and Richland avenues — previously a circle driveway overgrown with brush and hedges — into an eight-foot walled garden and courtyard with walking paths, grassy areas and paved spaces for children’s activities, speakers, musicians, receptions and other community events.

The new outdoor area also includes lush landscaping and a labyrinth garden with stone cladding from the Middle East, a touch that speaks to the congregation's roots. Merryman said the congregation wanted the area to function as a safe outdoor space for preschool students to play and for teachers to walk infants in strollers, while also broadening the synagogue's options for adult learning and communal events.

"Reclaiming it gave us the opportunity to create something beautiful, functional and safe for our preschool families, our students, and the congregation as a whole," Merryman said. "The garden has completely changed how we think about outdoor programming. It's peaceful and contemplative, but it's also highly usable — for children, for adult education, for music, for receptions and for community gatherings."

Seth Welty, principal architect at Colectivo, said one of the consistent design priorities throughout the project was to make the exterior spaces feel like an intentional part of the congregation's daily life rather than leftover land.

"One of the consistent themes in our design was finding meaningful ways to engage the exterior spaces and make them feel like a true extension of the interior, rather than leftover outdoor space," Welty said. "When we first came to the campus, it felt inward-facing and heavily dominated by parking and drive aisles. We made the exterior feel like part of the congregation's everyday world. It's a beautiful and peaceful outdoor space."

Esquerré added that the outdoor work reshaped not just the property, but how the congregation can use it. “The new prayer garden and courtyard really changed how the campus can be used. It took an underutilized part of the property and turned it into a beautiful, functional outdoor space that feels fully connected to the rest of the synagogue.”

Another notable addition is the moadon — a creative center for the arts with a covered, open-air, porch-like atmosphere.“It is designed so students can learn, create and connect with nature at the same time,” Merryman said. “It is a dynamic space that expands what our campus can offer, with students able to work in a space with fresh air blowing through while also looking out into nature for inspiration.”

Welty said the design concept for the moadon was influenced by a visit he and his team made to URJ Henry S. Jacobs Camp, a Jewish summer camp in Mississippi. “We saw a simple, screened-in art space, and what struck us was its humility and its sense of solitude in a natural setting,” Welty said. “We wanted to capture that same spirit here, even in the middle of the city.”

That design intent shaped where the moadon was placed within the larger campus composition. “That meant making the moadon a little more removed from the rest of the building and placing it as a freestanding component in the garden,” Welty said. “The goal was to funnel views out to the landscape and minimize views

of the surrounding built environment so the space could feel grounded and reflective."

The renovation also included a new meeting room overlooking the garden for adult programming and similar uses, along with about 10,000 square feet of interior renovations. Merryman said that even after earlier post-Katrina improvements, the interior still had a "'90s mall vibe," and the goal was to create a more cohesive style throughout the building.

In the sanctuary, the team sought to bring the outdoors inside through warm wood, lime-washed walls and a warmer, more inviting palette. A redesigned lighting system introduced lighting zones that can be adjusted for different occasions, including lower light for Kol Nidre on Yom Kippur or brighter settings for other events.

Welty said those interior choices emerged through a collaborative material and palette process centered on natural finishes and continuity. "When we started thinking about materiality and color, we began with natural materials we wanted to highlight," Welty said. "In this case, white oak became an important motif in the sanctuary, and that detailing carried into the social hall and adjacent spaces. From there, the palette evolved collaboratively with the owner's team."

Merryman also emphasized that the sanctuary backs up to the social hall, allowing the two to function as one large room when the movable wall is opened, with matching wood motifs at the back of the bema and across the social hall helping tie the spaces together.

"Inside, one of the biggest goals was to create a more cohesive and inspiring environment. The warmer materials, the improved lighting, and the way the sanctuary connects to the social hall all make the space feel more dynamic and more inviting," Merryman said. "The sanctuary and social hall now work together in a much more seamless way, which is especially important during major services and large gatherings."

Esquerré said that relationship between interior spaces was one of the most satisfying outcomes of the project. "What makes this project so special is how much it transformed the campus. It wasn't just about renovating interior space — it was about creating a more functional, welcoming environment that connects the sanctuary, education areas, and outdoor spaces in a much more intentional way," Esquerré said.

He added that seeing the finished campus was one of the strongest affirmations of the work. "It's always rewarding to see a space like this being actively used once the work is complete. For our team, that's the best part — knowing we helped create an environment that will serve the congregation and its families for years to come."

Welty agreed. "My favorite part of the project is seeing the congregants actually use the space," he said. "Yes, we care about designing and making pretty things, but what matters most is whether the community feels connected to it. This project gave us the chance to create something people can genuinely use and enjoy. You could feel how much love the congregation and the broader community invested in this project, and we were honored to be a part of it."

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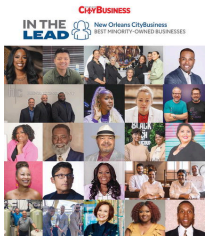

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