



PRESS RELEASE

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Exhibition at Ryan Middle School Chronicles the History of Third Ward

April 6, 2011—James D. Ryan Middle School at 2610 Elgin is a prominent landmark in Houston's historic Third Ward. Built in 1926, it was originally Jack Yates Colored Senior High School, the second such school in Houston. When a new Yates High School opened in 1958, it became Ryan Junior High School and is now Ryan Middle School. It was the birthplace of Third Ward education and it has played an important role in the history of the neighborhood.

That history has now been brought to life in the school's former woodshop in a historical exhibition entitled *WorkingShop*. At the same time, art students at Ryan are making some history of their own. Under the guidance of art teacher Anna Bass, they have been working on designs to be incorporated into the renovation of nearby Emancipation Park.

The land for the park was bought by former slaves in 1872 as a fairground for events such as the annual Juneteenth celebration. The effort to establish the park was led by the Reverend Jack Yates for whom Yates High School was named. In those days, African-Americans could not use Houston parks, so they established their own.

Bass says working on the renovation designs has given her students a boost in confidence, because they get to work with the actual architects who are renovating the park. "They get to see the whole process from start to finish, how you plan something, how you work with your community, how you get your ideas heard," Bass said. "It gives them a voice that maybe they didn't think they had."

Student designs for the park will be incorporated into the history exhibit along with timelines and a wealth of historical information. The exhibit was designed and built by architecture and graphics students from the University of Houston under the guiding hands of UH professors Patrick Peters, Cheryl Beckett and Carroll Parrot Blue, who is a Jack Yates graduate.

Blue, who is Research Professor at the [Center for Public History](#) and Executive Director of [The Dawn Project](#), says that since 2008 UH has been partnering with the Third Ward, its closest neighbor, through its UH-Third Ward Community Partnership Initiative. Blue stated that, "This Initiative brings Third Ward community-based programs together with 22 different UH campus-community programs. *WorkingShop* is the latest project. The team is introducing students to the importance of community in building Houston as a vibrant 21st century city that works for all its residents."

UH students created historical vignettes for the Ryan exhibition. They put together a replica of what was the social network of its day; the neighborhood barbershop and they have also re-created the office of prominent Jack Yates principal, William S. Holland.

Anna Bass says her students at Ryan have learned much about their school and their neighborhood and it has become a source of renewed pride. "I don't think the students thought about how much history has happened in this building, how many great people have walked these halls; how Texas Southern University got its start here," Bass said.

Bass says she has learned much herself. “It’s neat that a college started here. It’s neat that it was the second African American school in the city and it’s something the kids should take a lot of pride in,” Bass said. “I know I take a lot of pride in working here.”

The wood shop was chosen as the location for the exhibition because of the key economic role it played in providing trades for students which could open the doors to business ownership opportunities in the Third Ward.

The exhibition will be open to visitors on school days until May 1.

The **Houston Independent School District** is the largest school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the United States with 298 schools and more than 200,000 students. The 301-square-mile district is one of the largest employers in the Houston metropolitan area with nearly 30,000 employees.

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