

Henry Cisneros and New Orleans firms transform legendary San Antonio print shop

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Former Mayor Henry Cisneros and a New Orleans company are transforming his family's former print shop into a co-working space, which they plan to open early in 2020 — one of the first projects of its kind on West Side.

Launch Pad, a workspace developer, is renovating the 8,000-square-foot building on 2201 Buena Vista St. — onetime home of Munguia Printers, a hotbed in its day of political organizing and gossip.

“So many people recognize it. So many people have been there and went there to get their political ideas and support,” Cisneros said. “People respected it because of the part it played in the community, and I want to return it to a similar role.”

When Cisneros announced the project last year, he'd planned to turn the building into a tech workspace. But Launch Pad CEO Chris Schultz said the building will be open to entrepreneurs and startups of all stripes. The company offers work spaces, including desks, and private-office membership options on a monthly, six month or yearly basis.

“Technology and startups are a core and definitely an important part of Launch Pad membership, but we define our market as people working entrepreneurially,” Schultz said. “That also incorporates small businesses, freelancers, creatives and even professional services firms.”

Cisneros had planned to name the building The Shop Workspaces, and while the new partnership will change that plan, Cisneros said he still wants ‘The Shop’ to be worked into the title as homage to what the business once was.

Launch Pad started in New Orleans in 2009 as the city continued to rebuild after Hurricane Katrina. Companies that started in those original work spaces created 5,000 jobs, according to Schultz.

The company has since branched out to locations in New Jersey, Tennessee and California. San Antonio will be Launch Pad's first site in Texas.

"We really look for partners like Mr. Cisneros who want to activate the neighborhood and use this as a great hub for engagement," said Ann Driscoll, Launch Pad's president and chief operating officer.

As the founder and CEO of Webhead, one of the city's first information-technology companies, Janie Martinez Gonzalez knows the challenges of starting a business, including finding office space.

She launched her information technology firm on the West Side 25 years ago, and she planned to stay in the community. But she eventually moved to other parts of town because of a lack of available spaces. She said she's glad a co-working space is opening, but that it will take time for it to make an impact.

"That investment won't guarantee scalability," Gonzalez said. "What that investment will do is at least provide steady hope that over time companies like Webhead can prosper in that part of town and significantly make a difference with skilled jobs and growth."

While the partnership with Launch Pad will introduce new faces, the \$1 million renovation is a family affair.

Henry Cisneros' brother, Tim Cisneros, an architect and owner of Cisneros Design Studio, is working to preserve as much of the original building as possible. He was disappointed that rotting wood forced him to rebuild the second floor.

"The different generations and time periods in the life of a building are interesting to see when you take it over and re-purpose it," Tim Cisneros said. "I'm hoping that some of that story of some of that past is maintained."

While factory windows and polished concrete floors will be structural reminders of the former print shop, Henry Cisneros' brother, George Cisneros, is creating a mural with images of the family, old printing presses and potentially some of political campaign signs the shop produced.

The URBAN-15 music and media director is figuring out how to display the mural so it can be taken down and moved, instead of fixing it to the wall.

“I want it to be a celebration of the work ethic that was pioneered, developed and maintained at that print shop,” George Cisneros said.

Cisneros' grandfather Romulo Munguia immigrated from Mexico in 1926. He was a printer in Mexico, but during a period of political turmoil, making newspapers proved dangerous. After breaking ranks with then-President Alvaro Obregon, Munguia moved to San Antonio and worked at the Spanish-language newspaper La Prensa.

Ten years later, Munguia Printers made its mark on the West Side.

While the shop printed everything from football announcements to wedding invitations, Romulo Munguia also produced several newspapers that addressed Mexican-American issues.

But the shop became best known as a hub for local politicians when Romulo's son, Ruben Munguia, took the reins. Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez and Bexar County Commissioner Paul Elizondo, both deceased, are among the political figures who frequented Munguia Printers.

“You went not just to get political signs,” Cisneros said. “You went to get ideas about the campaign, about the messaging, to get ideas about your literature, your colors, your fonts. Over and over, Ruben Munguia played that role for San Antonians.”

Munguia Printers closed in 2007 after business took a sharp decline in the age of desktop publishing and digital media. There was talk about selling the property since debt and overdue taxes totaled about \$200,000. But Cisneros and his wife paid off the debt and back taxes, and purchased the building in 2016.

“Some had ideas in mind that would not enhance the West Side — flea market operations and so forth,” Cisneros said. “Instead of taking us upward to what was happening in other areas, they would take us backward.”

After speaking with architect and City Councilman Roberto Treviño about what to do with the land, Cisneros decided a co-working space could advance the community.

“As the councilman said, it was once a center of creativity and creative energy, and it needs to get there again,” he said.

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