



PRESERVATION OUTLEASING SUCCESS STORY

NPS Outleasing Program Revitalizes Historic Bathhouse Row

Hot Springs, Arkansas

THE PROJECT

Accented with Spanish Colonial- and Mediterranean-Revival Style architectural features, Bathhouse Row is a National Historic Landmark District consisting of historic therapeutic bathhouses and the landscape that surrounds them. The buildings form an urban edge at the base of the 5,500-acre Hot Springs National Park, which was founded in 1832 as the Hot Springs Reservation. It became a National Park in 1921. The 1915 Fordyce Bathhouse serves as the park visitor center and museum and includes a historic gymnasium; the 1922 Ozark is the park's gallery and cultural center; the 1923 Lamar houses Eastern National's Bathhouse Row Emporium; and, the Buckstaff Baths, in business at that location since 1912, still offers a traditional and luxurious thermal mineral bathing experience.

THE PROCESS

With the advent of modern medicine and the decline of bathing as a therapeutic treatment, the remaining four bathhouses closed in the 1970s and '80s, and then suffered from decades of disinvestment. In the mid-2000s, the park secured \$12 million to replace roofs, remediate lead paint, address structural and life safety deficiencies, and upgrade utilities, but additional investment was still needed. Section 111 of the National Historic Preservation Act allows federal agencies to lease historic property to the private sector, and through a formal process, the park sought out proposals for commercial uses. The ornate 1922 Quapaw still had much of its bathhouse fittings and infrastructure in place and could serve in that capacity again; in 2007, the National Park Service (NPS) signed a lease with a local partnership, Quapaw Baths LLC, and a modern spa was opened in 2008. For the smallest bathhouse, the 1916 Superior, independent restaurateur Rose Schweikhart negotiated a long-term lease for a craft brewery, restaurant, and private event space, which opened in 2013. For the older 1892 Hale, next door and a bit larger, there was potential for a small boutique hotel; Hot Springs Mayor Pat McCabe and his wife Ellen took on the adaptive use project which opened in 2019.

“Our business partners invest significant amounts of time, money, and heart into working with us to preserve these special places. Together, our efforts ensure the historic bathhouses have a new life and new energy to serve our visitors now and in the future.”

— Laura A. Miller, Superintendent, Hot Springs National Park

The local partnership that leases the historic Quapaw Baths offers visitors award-winning spa experiences. (NPS)



THE SUCCESS

Today, the Buckstaff and Quapaw continue to provide visitors award-winning historic spa experiences, while the Fordyce and Ozark serve as park and community gathering spaces. The historic row is now further enlivened by the Hale Hotel and its gourmet restaurant, which received Preserve Arkansas' 2019 Excellence in Preservation through Rehabilitation Award, and the Superior Bathhouse Brewery, which is the only brewery in a National Park and the only brewery in the world that utilizes thermal spring water to make beer. In an effort to bring back one of the last remaining underutilized historic bathhouses, the 1912 Maurice with a therapeutic pool in the basement, Park Superintendent Laura Miller is requesting funds for upgrading building systems.

Visitors stroll along Bathhouse Row, a National Historic Landmark District, to which the numerous Spanish Colonial- and Mediterranean-Revival Style bathhouses contribute. Since 2013, the Superior Bathhouse Brewery has served as a craft brewery, restaurant, and private event space. (NPS)

Partners:

National Park Service

U.S. Forest Service, Southeast Research Station (Medical Directors Residence)

U.S. Representative Bruce Westerman

Arkansas State Historic Preservation Office

Buckstaff Bath Company (Buckstaff Bathhouse)

Hotel Hale (Hale Bathhouse)

Quapaw Baths and Spa, LLC (Quapaw Bathhouse)

Superior Bathhouse Brewery (Superior Bathhouse)

Vapor Valley Spirits, Inc.

Zest Enterprise LLC

