



KATRINA & RITA

FIVE YEARS LATER

2005-2010



Rubble surrounds a house in an aerial view of damage from Hurricane Katrina in Long Beach, Mississippi.

Hope can only

Disaster is a starting point. It's the beginning of a story about recovery, about resilience, about reclaiming inch by inch what was destroyed in an instant.

Five years ago, on Aug. 29, Hurricane Katrina roared onto the U.S. Gulf Coast, launching a chain of natural and man-made catastrophes that killed more than 1,800 people and did \$135 billion in property damages. More than 1 million people were displaced from their homes and livelihoods, setting in motion one of the largest mass migrations in the nation's history.

Less than a month after Katrina, Category 3 Hurricane Rita barreled onto land, leaving in its wake seven more deaths and \$15 billion in damages, and sending thousands more families scrambling to find safe, permanent shelter.

■ Katrina: Five Years Later

*Reported and written by Teresa K. Weaver.
Additional reporting by Shelly Whittet and Lurma Rackley.
Edited by Susan J. Stevenson.
Designed by Sheri Taylor Emery.
Copy edited by Adam R. Smith.
Photographs by Ezra Millstein (cover), Steffan Hacker,
Jennifer Graves, Gregg Pachkowski, Hilary Duffy, Barbara
Davidson, Robert Galbraith, Smiley N. Pool, Michael
Mulvey, Holly Eaton, Brian Myrick, Jason Reed, Will
Crocker, Kim MacDonald and gilfordphoto.com.*

move forward.

Habitat for Humanity, which had been a presence throughout the Gulf Coast states for nearly 30 years, responded to this disaster immediately and pledged to stay for the long haul. In the first few weeks after Katrina, Habitat affiliates and volunteers across the country had begun building house frames to be delivered to the Gulf. Within six weeks, on-site construction began on the first Habitat hurricane-response house. Since then, Habitat affiliates and their partners have built, rehabbed or repaired more than 2,200 houses in the hardest-hit areas of Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Texas.

Rebuilding the U.S. Gulf Coast has tested the fortitude and the resources of residents, political leaders, volunteers and nonprofit organizations. Five years later, the scars of the devastation are deep, if far less visible.

Many residents still measure time by the hurricanes; events happened either “before the storm” or “after the storm.”

People who lost everything now cling to what remains: life, family and friends, home.

“The greatest thing is to love people,” said Mary Spinks Thigpen, a longtime community activist in Gulfport, Mississippi, and a new Habitat homeowner. “You don’t have to be in a hurricane to be compassionate. You don’t have to drown to know that water will take you away if you’re in too deep.”

Jim Pate, executive director of New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity, revels in all the small moments that seem monumental in his city’s slow and tortuous recovery.

“In those first deep, dark months after Katrina, everything you saw around you was gray,” he said. “Even all the birds had left. I remember the first time I heard a bird post-Katrina. It was just before dawn, and I was sitting on the porch drinking a cup of coffee I had made on a kerosene stove. When the bird sang, it was two beats before I realized what it was. And then I splashed coffee

continued on next page >



The hurricanes of 2005 didn't create an affordable housing crisis in all of these communities; they just exacerbated it.



all over the street, jumping up and down, screaming, 'It's a bird! Listen! It's a bird!'"

Before the hurricane season of 2005, New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity built 12 to 14 houses a year. Between its founding in 1984 and 2005, it had built 101. In the five years since Katrina, the affiliate has built nearly 300.

Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, in Biloxi, has built almost 400 houses since Katrina.

Bay-Waveland Habitat for Humanity in Bay St. Louis, which didn't even exist before Katrina, has built 140 houses with hurricane-affected families.

Throughout the Gulf Coast area, Habitat affiliates that faithfully built one or two houses a year are now building 10 or 12. Affiliates that used to build a dozen a year are now building two or three times that.

The impact was immediate, and yet it is long-term.

The hurricanes of 2005 didn't create an affordable housing crisis in these communities; they just exacerbated it.

Affiliate leaders have forged new partnerships—with government agencies, other nonprofits, corporations—to meet the immediate needs of low-income families, but also to bolster their ongoing efforts to eliminate substandard housing altogether.

"Hurricane Katrina pushed us," said Cindy Griffin, executive director of Metro Jackson Habitat for Humanity. "It gave everybody involved a level of confidence that there really wasn't anything we couldn't do if we put our minds to it. It also made us think in new and different ways about how to grow and expand.

"Our mantra throughout has been: We are going to expand.

We're not going to redirect what we already do; we're going to *multiply* what we do."

Five years beyond Katrina, that mindset propels the work of Habitat throughout the Gulf.

With new partnerships in place, new methodologies tested and new capacities built, audacious goals embrace the new realities. Nobody talks about going back to previous levels of building only a few houses a year. In fact, some Habitat affiliate leaders have set sustainable goals that serve three to five times the families they were serving before the historic hurricane season of 2005.

For survivors, "it was a total shock and a new beginning," said Ailene Preston, who relocated from Picayune, Mississippi, to Meridian after Katrina destroyed her home.

Hope can only move forward.

Contents

6

The Wind & the Water

The storm's destruction
By the numbers

12

The Work

The rebuilding begins
The Jackson affiliate
Q&A with Kenneth J. Meinert
Donors

26

Family Stories

30

The Way Forward

The promise
Q&A with Jonathan Reckford
Q&A with Larry Gluth

38

How You Can Help

39

Affiliates in the Region

41

Recovery by the Numbers

At left: Site supervisor Jon Bakker (in baseball cap) leads the construction of house frames in Jackson, Mississippi, less than a month after Hurricane Katrina.

The Wind &



Desperate pleas scrawled on rooftops alert rescuers that survivors need help in the aftermath of flooding in New Orleans. More than 50 levee breaches swamped the city and surrounding areas after Hurricane Katrina.

Five years after the deadly hurricane season, it's important to recall how bad things were in the fall of 2005 to appreciate how far the region has come.

The destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina was so widespread and so severe, the statistics are almost impossible to fathom. Some Mississippi coastal towns were nearly wiped off the map, as a storm surge destroyed 90 percent of the buildings and most of the infrastructure. When the levees protecting New Orleans failed, approximately 80 percent of the city was flooded. Tornadoes spawned by Katrina stretched hundreds of miles inland. Widespread power outages throughout the region affected millions of people, some for nearly two months.

The storm displaced more than a million people in the Gulf Coast region. Some were able to return home—or at

least to salvage what remained of their home—within a few days. But up to 600,000 households were still displaced a month after Katrina, when Hurricane Rita added to the misery.

At their peak, hurricane evacuee shelters housed 273,000 people, according to official estimates. FEMA trailers later housed at least 114,000 households. Several hundred families were still living in FEMA trailers in the spring of 2010, proving how desperate the affordable housing situation remains.

As in most disasters, the people hurt the most are those who had the least to begin with. People living and working on the edge of poverty have little to cushion the blow of any disaster, much less one of this magnitude.

Total property damage from hurricanes Katrina and Rita was a staggering \$150 billion—\$135 billion from Katrina and \$15 billion from Rita. That is more than twice the combined damages from Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the Los Angeles earthquake in 1994, and the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

In Alabama: Flooding and fallen trees

■ Hurricane-force winds, flooding and tornadoes pushed small ships and oil rigs ashore, destroyed marinas and fishing areas, and swamped beachfront hotels and homes. Twenty-two counties were declared disaster areas.

■ Mobile Bay spilled into downtown Mobile, causing 2 to 6 feet of flooding.

the Water



Bertan Antwon, 4, cries as he holds his mom's hand while waiting for food at a Biloxi, Mississippi, emergency shelter.

“Nothing was left. (Katrina) took the roof off, tore the bottom out, took out the whole bottom floor. Everything that water touched, you had to throw out.”

– Barbara Magee, a Habitat homeowner in Pascagoula, Mississippi



Mold takes over a kitchen in post-Katrina New Orleans.



Hurricane survivors meet to worship at Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church in Biloxi, Mississippi.



A child's toy sits undamaged in front of an obliterated house in the Upper 9th Ward of New Orleans.

continued from page 6

In Louisiana: Massive destruction and displacement

■ Katrina made landfall about 27 miles east of downtown New Orleans, with sustained winds of 127 mph and a 22-foot storm surge.

■ Approximately 1 million people had fled New Orleans and its suburbs by the evening of Aug. 28. An estimated 100,000 people remained behind.

■ About 10,000 people sought refuge at the Louisiana Superdome, which had been prepared to accommodate 800. Eventually, 30,000 people arrived at the Superdome before they were evacuated to other cities.

■ Katrina's storm surge caused 53 separate levee breaches in greater New Orleans, submerging 80 percent of the city. More than 1,500 people died, most from drowning.

■ Heavy rain and storm surge flooded the northeastern shore of Lake Pontchartrain, inundating communities from Slidell to Mandeville.

■ The I-10 Twin Span Bridge connecting Slidell to New Orleans was one of several bridges destroyed.

■ 81 percent of the housing units in St. Bernard Parish were damaged; 80 percent in Plaquemines Parish; 70 percent in St. Tammany Parish, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

■ Less than a month after Katrina, Hurricane Rita hit southwestern Louisiana, essentially destroying several communities in Cameron Parish, inflicting heavy losses on surrounding areas, and leaving 2 million people without electricity.

In Mississippi: Devastation in the eye of the storm

■ In Hancock County, the eyewall of Katrina washed away almost every structure within a half-mile of the beach in Waveland. Concrete slabs, driveways and steps leading nowhere were the only reminders that homes ever stood there.

■ Floodwaters reached 12 miles inland in Bay St. Louis.

■ In Mississippi's two other coastal counties—Harrison and Jackson—storm surges up to 30 feet wiped out 90 percent of the buildings along the Biloxi-Gulfport coastline. Massive casino barges were pulled out of the water and onto parking lots.

■ Two major bridges—connecting Biloxi and Ocean Springs, and Bay St. Louis and Pass Christian—were

washed away. Heavy debris was visible along Highway 90 for months to come.

■ In Pass Christian, the destruction was almost complete, and 90 percent of Pascagoula was flooded.

■ Mississippi Emergency Management Agency officials recorded deaths from Katrina as far inland as the capital city of Jackson and into Warren and Leake counties.

■ Katrina was more than 150 miles from the coast, near Meridian, when it finally lost hurricane strength. All 82 counties in the state were designated disaster areas.

In Texas: A refuge before Rita

■ Texas, which was not directly damaged by Katrina, took in an estimated 250,000 evacuees from Louisiana, overwhelming local resources and prompting Gov. Rick Perry to declare a state of emergency.

■ Less than a month after Katrina, the extreme southeastern parts of Texas were hammered by high winds spawned by Hurricane Rita. The city of Beaumont lost an estimated 25 percent of its trees, and north of Houston, the Lake Livingston Dam suffered extensive damage from powerful waves driven by 117 mph winds.

■ Many houses and businesses were heavily damaged from wind and falling trees. In some areas, electricity wasn't restored for more than six weeks. 🏠



Nearly five years after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, crumbling buildings and empty foundations can still be found throughout the 9th Ward in New Orleans in 2010.

A homeowner's story

Barbara Magee, now a Habitat homeowner in Pascagoula, Mississippi, reconstructs that day in late August 2005 like a master storyteller. She grabbed her photo album of her two daughters on a whim on the way out of the house to go to friends and family on somewhat higher ground in Escatawpa, north of Pascagoula.



“We watched the hurricane come in. At 10 in the morning, it was dark like it was midnight. The wind was so high we had to hold on to each other when we walked so we didn't blow away.

“On TV I saw the water was over the stop sign on Marcus Street. ‘That's my baby's school,’ I cried. Then I knew we didn't have a chance. Then we lost the lights.

“That water came up so fast, so fast. The next day it went out just as fast.

“She left a mess. You couldn't go down streets with trees down and pavements (buckled) up. All those old oak trees, she laid all them down. Never seen a storm do what Katrina did.”

Destruction by the

15

Inches of rainfall recorded in Slidell, Louisiana, during Hurricane Katrina—the highest in the state.

53

Levee breaches in greater New Orleans after Katrina.

70

Percent of housing units in New Orleans damaged by Hurricane Katrina and flooding.

81

Percent of housing units damaged in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana.



The remains of a church in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.



A car is crushed under a house after flooding in New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward.

1,800

Estimated number of people killed.

90,000

Square miles declared disaster area after the hurricanes, nearly the size of the United Kingdom.

250,000

Katrina evacuees from Louisiana who sought refuge in Houston, Texas.

Numbers

82

Counties in Mississippi. All were declared disaster areas in Katrina's wake; 47 qualified for full assistance.

150

Number of football fields that would be filled—50 feet high—with Katrina debris from Hancock County, Mississippi, alone.

217

Square miles of land that was transformed to water by Katrina and Rita, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

260

Families who were still living in FEMA-provided trailers in Louisiana and Mississippi on March 30, 2010.



A family uses a boat to seek shelter in New Orleans.



An abandoned home in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, bears a message of hope.

1 million

People displaced in the immediate aftermath of Katrina. Also the number of housing units damaged or destroyed.

1.3 million

Acres of forest land destroyed in Mississippi.

3 million

People in the Gulf Coast region left without electricity, some for weeks.

\$150 billion

Total estimated damage from hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The Work



Christine Logan marvels at the progress on her future house in Pascagoula, Mississippi, during the 2008 Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project.

The unprecedented scale of destruction from hurricanes Katrina and Rita demanded a response to match.

Habitat for Humanity began construction on its first post-Katrina house in October 2005—just six weeks after the hurricane hit—as soon as first responders had met the immediate needs of water, food and emergency health care for survivors.

In the days and weeks immediately after Katrina, the conditions for rebuilding seemed almost insurmountable. Basic infrastructure had been wiped out in many communities along the Mississippi coast. In New Orleans, much of the city sat empty and saturated. Throughout Mississippi, Louisiana

and Alabama, hurricane-force winds, tornadoes and historic amounts of rain had downed trees and power lines, blocking roads and demolishing bridges that normally would have allowed repair crews through.

In those early days, Habitat staff members and volunteers slept in cars, in tents, in church basements or empty schools, in houses without power or water. They ate canned food and cooked on camp stoves, often having to drive for miles to get basic supplies.

Within a few weeks, volunteer campsites began to spring up in New Orleans, Biloxi, Bay St. Louis and elsewhere to accommodate the steady stream of volunteers who wanted to

help however they could.

Habitat was among the first organizations on the ground after Katrina, and it's one of only a handful still at work there. The result of that commitment and visibility is a hard-earned credibility that transcends one storm.

Mary Spinks Thigpen, a longtime community activist, advocated for dozens of her neighbors in the Forest Heights community of Gulfport, Mississippi, before addressing her own housing needs. Nearly five years after her home was irreparably damaged by Katrina, Thigpen recently moved into a new home, built in partnership with Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

"We needed somebody we could trust," Thigpen said. "And Habitat you can trust."

Operation Home Delivery

Immediately after Katrina hit, Operation Home Delivery was launched to marshal the resources, partnerships and unbridled enthusiasm of Habitat affiliates and countless volunteers from all over the world. Because so many of the Habitat affiliates along the Gulf Coast were coping with logistical nightmares of their own, a unified, well-orchestrated approach to long-term recovery was crucial from the beginning.

The goal of Operation Home Delivery was threefold:

- To provide long-term housing solutions for hurricane-affected families in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Alabama.
- To get Habitat affiliates in the hardest-hit areas back up and running in the short term and to help them find ways to build more houses for the long term.
- To be a catalyst for comprehensive, collaborative efforts to rebuild the Gulf Coast.

The response from Habitat affiliates that were not directly affected by the hurricane was swift and decisive. Far from the disaster zone, affiliates started building and rehabbing houses to accommodate evacuees in desperate need.

Helen and Reynoud Duplessis credit divine intervention with leading them and their six children from their ravaged home in New Orleans to Baltimore, Maryland. With the help of the Baltimore Ravens NFL team and the Garrison Forest School, Sandtown Habitat for Humanity rehabbed a five-bedroom house for the family in the fall of 2006. "We get to have some normalcy in our lives again," Helen told the Baltimore Times. "We have back our little corner of the world."

Such remarkable homecomings were happening for



Anna Marie Lynch, from the National Hockey League, leaves a message for a new homeowner family in 2009 in Moss Point, Mississippi.

"There were no moments dark enough that God's light did not shine through and provide strength and encouragement."

—Kenneth J. Meinert, senior vice president for Operation Home Delivery, Habitat's Gulf recovery effort after hurricanes Katrina and Rita

displaced Gulf Coast residents all over the country—in Denver, Colorado; Evansville, Indiana; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Durham, North Carolina; Joplin, Missouri; Little Rock, Arkansas; St. Augustine, Florida; Dallas, Texas; and elsewhere.

Well-publicized building events were held on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., at Major League Baseball's World Series, at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City. Through the innovative "Habitat House-in-a-Box" program, house frames were built at sites throughout the United States and Canada and then shipped—by rail, by barge, by flatbed truck—for use in the Gulf recovery efforts.



Habitat volunteers clean debris from a flooded house in Chalmette, Louisiana, in preparation for rehabbing.

“I feel like a lot of people are moving on, but a lot of people still have to. People are still fighting to rebuild their lives.”

—Kimberley Stewart, Habitat homeowner in Covington, Louisiana

Because of those efforts, the pace of production increased exponentially, putting people into safe, affordable homes quicker than would have been possible without outside support.

Habitat began building its 500th hurricane-response house in November 2006, in Mobile, Alabama, little more than a year after Katrina struck. By January 2007, house No. 700 was under way. And on May 21, 2007, former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, helped raise the walls on house No. 1,000, in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana.

To put those numbers in context: Before the summer of 2005, all the Gulf Coast affiliates combined built about 57 houses in a typical year. Since Katrina, they have built, repaired or rehabbed more than 400 a year—a total of 2,200 homes in the four affected states since September 2005.

Every month, all 2,200 of those mortgage payments go toward Habitat operations, making it possible to build more houses with more families in need.

Operation Home Delivery was officially phased out in 2008, replaced by an ongoing program called the Gulf Recovery Effort, with local affiliates leading the rebuilding efforts with support from Habitat for Humanity International.

Volunteers in action

Habitat for Humanity maintains one of the strongest, most passionate corps of volunteers worldwide. In the immediate aftermath of Katrina, 70,000 volunteers expressed an interest in going to the Gulf to help. As soon as it was possible to travel to the hurricane-battered states, volunteers started arriving at a blistering pace of 1,600 a week. Some volunteers traveled solo; some came in groups; and some entire church congregations made the journey.

Russell Abbrecht, a Habitat homeowner and longtime resident of Waveland, Mississippi, credits churches and faith-based organizations with leading the early rebuilding efforts.

“If it wasn’t for God and the faith-based groups like Habitat, there’d be nothing down here still,” Abbrecht said. “Absolutely nothing.”

Celeste Place, the first subdivision being built by Hattiesburg Area Habitat for Humanity, illustrates the crucial role faith communities continue to play in rebuilding the Gulf Coast. This Mississippi subdivision of 10 homes—with a playground and green space—is being funded almost entirely by a dozen churches in Hattiesburg, including Methodist, Catholic and Baptist congregations.

West Point Baptist Church in Hattiesburg sponsored a home for longtime member Monica Stallworth and her three children.

Together, they found a way

Jackson affiliate nurtures new affiliate on the coast

From the day after Hurricane Katrina to ongoing construction, Habitat's Gulf Coast recovery efforts have depended on collaboration. One of the best examples is the very existence of the Bay-Waveland affiliate.

Mississippi's three coastal counties—Harrison, Jackson and Hancock—took a direct hit from Katrina on Aug. 29, 2005, suffering the most sustained, intense destruction of the entire region. Of those three counties, only Hancock—with its coastal cities of Waveland and Bay St. Louis—had no Habitat for Humanity program in place.

Enter Metro Jackson Habitat for Humanity, a well-established affiliate in the capital city, nearly 150 miles north.

Cindy Griffin, executive director in Jackson since January 2005, and her staff began fielding calls from groups all over the country who wanted to help immediately after Katrina.

And so, the affiliate's executive committee met within days of Katrina's landfall—amid widespread power outages and extensive wind damage in their city—and started planning how to get help to the coast.

"This was the biggest thing that had ever hit us, and we were going to be affected," Griffin said. "We could either help or we could be left behind. ... And my board said, 'We'll do whatever we need to do.'"

Metro Jackson became one of the first Habitat affiliates to commit to building homes-in-a-box to ship directly to people in need on the coast. On Labor Day weekend—only a few days after Katrina struck—the affiliate and its legion of volunteers built 40 house frames bound for the Gulf. Mississippi first lady Marsha Barbour attended the event and talked to Griffin at length about the needs on the coast.

Barbour immediately drove down to Waveland and talked to Mayor Tommy Longo, Griffin recalled. "She said, 'Mayor Longo, you need to talk to Cindy Griffin in Jackson!' And that's how it started.

"It started snowballing quickly," Griffin said. "Oprah Winfrey's folks called and wanted to do something down there. So they came to Jackson, and I took them down."

Wendy McDonald had taken a sabbatical from her job as a college dean in Houston to help the cleanup in her hometown of Bay St. Louis. Her stay stretched longer and

longer, and eventually McDonald relocated for good, taking on the task of running Habitat's local disaster recovery efforts.

At first, the work was done under the auspices of Metro Jackson Habitat, but in January 2008, Habitat for Humanity Bay-Waveland Area was officially established, with McDonald as executive director.

Started with two full-time employees—McDonald and Mark Scott, who had moved from Jackson to be construction manager—the affiliate now has a staff of 18. Since Katrina, Habitat has built more than 140 houses in the Bay-Waveland area, and plans to build 40 more through 2011.

Among the fans of this collaboration-in-a-crisis is Larry Gluth, senior vice president for Habitat's field operations in the United States and Canada.

"It's people like Wendy—and the board and the volunteers—who really make Habitat happen at a local level," said Gluth, who traveled to Waveland in March 2010 to present McDonald's affiliate with a plaque proclaiming it "Affiliate of the Year."

"None of this would have happened without the support of Metro Jackson," said McDonald.

Habitat Metro Jackson will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2011. Since Katrina, that affiliate has built 139 houses, ratcheting up its production so that families in need in its own service area weren't overlooked during the crisis in the Gulf.

"Katrina made us think in new and different ways about how to grow and expand," Griffin said. "We kept working for the folks who were already in our pipeline that we needed to be building for, plus built for evacuee families here in Jackson.

"We found a way."



Cindy Griffin



Wendy McDonald



A shipping container loaded with Habitat for Humanity house frames—bound for the Gulf Coast—is loaded onto a barge in the Mississippi River in the shadow of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Missouri, in November 2005.



America Builds on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., brings together members of Congress, leaders from Habitat for Humanity affiliates, Freddie Mac staff and volunteers from across the country to build containerized houses for the Gulf in November 2005.

continued from page 14

“It’s very emotional to talk about this,” Stallworth said. “It’s such a blessing for a single mother. This home is ours, and that’s very special.”

Since 2005, local church groups have stepped up to the challenge of providing funds and volunteer labor throughout the Gulf region. And many groups have made repeated trips from around the United States and Canada to the Gulf Coast, establishing long-term friendships with affiliate leaders and keeping the volunteer rolls strong.

The number of volunteers isn’t quite what it was in the immediate aftermath of the storms, but a steady stream of people continues to make its way to these communities in need.

Jim Pate, executive director of New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity, estimates that 150,000 volunteers have put in an incalculable number of hours rebuilding in that city alone over the past five years. In March 2010, he addressed a crowd of 200 college students from all over the country who spent spring break building houses in the Upper 9th Ward.

“You’ve been here, you’ve seen it,” Pate said. “When you go home—to your colleges, your social clubs, your faith communities—tell everybody the job is not done. This is a marathon, not a sprint.

“These houses are the tangible example of our ministry,” he added. “But our real mission is to eradicate poverty housing wherever it exists. When you get home, find the Habitat affiliate near you. Get involved.”

Just across the Mississippi River, in New Orleans’ Jefferson Parish, a team of volunteers from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons was wrapping up a week of building Habitat houses. Their story exemplifies the ripple effect of Habitat’s work, as well as the profound impact the rebuilding continues to have.

The orthopaedic surgeons group was scheduled to have its annual conference in New Orleans in March 2006 but had to relocate because the city could not accommodate such a large event so soon after the storm. And so, the group held its meeting in Chicago, but donated \$10 from each night booked to fund construction of six houses in New Orleans. And in March 2010, the group returned to New Orleans—31,000 members strong—for its annual meeting.

The weeklong conference had an economic impact of \$35 million to \$40 million on the city, according to the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau. And after the meeting was over, the group offered to pay for accommodations for any member who wanted to stick around for another week and help build.

Brian Moore, a media producer from Chicago, was a first-time Habitat volunteer.

“I felt like all my excuses were erased and I had to help,” he said. “My only regret was not getting involved sooner. I signed up with my local Habitat for Humanity the day I got home.”

Throughout the Gulf region, affiliates have nurtured relationships with volunteers who responded during the crisis but have

Q&A

with Kenneth J. Meinert

‘The work continues!’

From 2005 to 2008, Kenneth J. Meinert served as senior vice president of Habitat for Humanity’s Operation Home Delivery in the Gulf Coast. Meinert, former chairman of the board of directors for Habitat for Humanity Canada, brought more than 25 years’ experience in senior leadership positions within the construction industry in Canada, the United States and Europe. In 2010, he came out of retirement to be a senior adviser for Habitat’s response to the earthquake in Haiti.



Q: *Do you have a memory that especially illustrates the great need in the Gulf after the storms or the importance of Habitat’s work there?*

KM: Thousands of homes sat under water for weeks after the levee failures. Thousands of Habitat volunteers worked with families to gut and prepare homes for rebuilding. Oftentimes, a shoebox of personal articles was all that could be salvaged from these homes.

On May 22, 2007, when President Jimmy Carter and many other Habitat volunteers stood shoulder to shoulder with Salvation Army majors, framing the 1,000th and 1,001st homes built with Katrina-affected families, I was very pleased to be a small part of this large work. [A Ken Meinert legacy house was built during the celebration.]

Q: *What are you most proud of about Habitat for Humanity’s work in the Gulf?*

KM: Without church groups from around the country, there would have been no recovery. The work could not have been done without young leaders who took on tremendous responsibilities and executed them superbly. Many were AmeriCorps. All were asked to design and implement initiatives unprecedented in nature or scale. Young Michael Hayes, for example, established and operated a volunteer camp called Camp Hope that served thousands of volunteers who came from away to assist. Bathing and feeding 600 campers in an old flooded school building is no easy task!

Q: *What do you think is most important for Habitat for Humanity supporters—volunteers and donors—to know about Habitat’s work to respond to hurricanes Katrina and Rita?*

KM: The work continues!



In late September 2005, Rockefeller Plaza in New York City becomes “Humanity Plaza,” as volunteers build houses for Habitat for Humanity’s Operation Home Delivery to help families displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

since made repeated trips back to keep building. Villanova University in Pennsylvania sent its eighth crew of volunteers down to Picayune, Mississippi, this spring.

Another crew of students from the University of Illinois in Champaign rode in a 12-passenger van for 14 hours to arrive in Picayune around midnight. After a few hours’ sleep, they were on the site of a family’s new home, hammering away.

“This is really rewarding to me,” said Christy Pomatto, a junior at the University of Illinois, taking a short break from lying on her back under the house to secure insulation. “I mean, I’m lying in mud and sand,” she added, laughing. “But I’m doing it for a good purpose.”

In 2008, Habitat’s 25th annual Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project was held in Biloxi, Gulfport and Pascagoula, Mississippi, to refocus media attention on all the rebuilding still needed throughout the region. Besides Habitat of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, 18 affiliates—from Houston to Mobile—had special building events that week in May, harnessing the energy of more than 2,500 volunteers from all over the world and sending them home with stories of the work left to do.

Building capacity

Disaster response has become an increasingly vital component of Habitat for Humanity’s mission to eliminate poverty housing. Every calamity—from 1992’s Hurricane Andrew to 2004’s Indian Ocean tsunami to the killer hurricane season of 2005 to 2010’s earthquakes in Haiti and Chile—has increased Habitat’s depth of knowledge and sense of focus.

Donna Fischer, executive director of Pearl River County Habitat in Picayune, has seen firsthand how disaster response has raised community awareness about the need for affordable housing.

“Before Katrina, the community was not even aware we had an affiliate,” Fischer said. “Now we’re a big presence. People know who we are and what we do.”

The Pearl River affiliate, founded in 1995, had built a total of three houses in 10 years before Katrina spawned multiple tornadoes that downed trees and knocked out electricity for weeks in Picayune. In June 2010, staff and volunteers were working on their 15th hurricane-response house.

Pearl River County is an example of a small affiliate with big ambitions and big impact. At the other end of the spectrum, large affiliates—in Houston, Texas, and Jackson, Mississippi, for instance—found the means and the will to ratchet up production even further in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.



Mark Scott, then construction manager for Metro Jackson (Mississippi) Habitat for Humanity, cuts plywood as dawn breaks on Sept. 28, 2005. Among the earliest Habitat responders after Hurricane Katrina, Scott now works as construction director for the Bay-Waveland affiliate.

“It taught us some different models for increasing capacity without necessarily just growing your staff,” said Cindy Griffin, executive director of Metro Jackson Habitat. “There are ways to take advantage of a short-term boost and really ratchet up your operations without adding more overhead.”

Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, in Biloxi, pushes the edge of the productivity spectrum. Before Katrina, Habitat affiliates in Harrison and Jackson counties built a combined total of 36 houses in 20 years. In the five years since the storm, the merged affiliates have built nearly 400 houses. Also, the service area has been expanded to include Stone County—a rural inland county just north of Harrison—giving more people in need the hope of getting a home of their own.

“Our goal is transformational change,” said Chris Monforton, chief executive officer of the Mississippi Gulf Coast affiliate since the 2007 merger. Monforton began as an AmeriCorps member and HFHI employee.

Same mission, new approaches

Among many lessons learned from Katrina, Monforton said, is the need for Habitat to be nimble and intentional in its approach. Disaster recovery is multifaceted and



Homeowner Kiwana Thorton hammers on the foundation of a Habitat house in Slidell, Louisiana, as debris from a destroyed trailer still sits in the background.



Eagle Finegan, an aspiring photographer, cuts the ribbon for her new Habitat home in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, in March 2010.

For three years, Eagle Finegan has shared a 28-foot 1982 RV with her two cats and a dog. It has been a shelter, she tells Habitat volunteers, but it has not been a home. "This," she said, pointing to the pink house behind her, "is a home."

complex, and programs need to address the realities at hand.

Affordability has become the most pressing issue throughout the Gulf Coast region, as the recession lingers and insurance and tax rates skyrocket. The cost of insuring homes in the region is five times what it was before Katrina, Monforton said, increasing from \$600-\$700 a year to \$2,800-\$3,000.

Moving forward, Monforton said the affiliate likely will slow down the number of new construction projects while ratcheting up the affiliate's rehab program and beginning an extensive program of hazard mitigation and fortification—making existing houses more structurally sound and hurricane-resistant, and tremendously increasing the number of families served.

The affiliate is also making good use of MEMA (Mississippi Emergency Management Agency) cottages, which replaced the FEMA trailers along the Mississippi Gulf Coast and are now being taken off their chassis, expanded and converted into permanent homes. Built to meet the architectural standards of south Mississippi, the converted "Katrina cottages" are indistinguishable from traditionally built homes and are designed to withstand a Category 3 hurricane.

Half an hour away, in Waveland, homeowner-to-be Eagle Finegan is finishing up her sweat-equity hours so she can move into a Katrina cottage recently converted by Habitat for Humanity Bay-Waveland Area. Her hot-pink house sat for four years in the parking lot of the local Lowe's, open for community members to inspect.

In March 2010, Lowe's—a longtime corporate partner of Habitat's—donated the cottage and footed the \$10,000 bill to have it moved to its permanent spot five miles away in Bayside Park in Bay

St. Louis. On hand for the official house dedication were dozens of Habitat volunteers—from Frederick, Maryland; Indiana University; Texas A&M and elsewhere—along with local donors and dignitaries and Larry Gluth, HFHI’s senior vice president for field operations in the United States and Canada.

“Many of you have already found out that this place will change you,” Gluth said to the volunteers gathered to cheer Eagle Finegan’s unusual homecoming in the Lowe’s parking lot. “Habitat changes your life. And you volunteers are the lifeblood of everything that Habitat does.”

Finegan, like many people in Waveland, lost everything to Hurricane Katrina. For the past three years, she has shared a 28-foot 1982

RV with her two cats and a dog. It has been a shelter, she tells the volunteers, but it has not been a home.

“This,” she said, pointing to the pink house behind her, “is a home.”

The distinction is clear to everyone in the crowd, including Wendy McDonald, a native of Bay St. Louis who returned home after Katrina to help rebuild her city and now serves as executive director of Habitat Bay-Waveland Area.

“Sometimes we just see how much work remains to be done,” McDonald said. “But every time we see a homeowner move into a new home, it’s renewal for us.”

Partners in recovery

Urgent need in the Gulf pushed Habitat to build on well-established

partnerships—with government agencies, churches, corporations and nongovernmental organizations—and to forge many new ones. As one of the few aid organizations that specialize in construction, Habitat could focus on rebuilding while its partners helped fulfill other needs of a community in crisis.

In 2006, Habitat teamed up with Church World Service and Rebuilding Together to begin cleaning up and repairing 994 hurricane-damaged houses for elderly, disabled and low-income homeowners. The \$4.5 million collaboration maximized limited resources, prevented duplication of efforts and provided more homes for people in dire need.

Another innovative partnership was begun shortly after Katrina with



Former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, help build the 1,000th hurricane-recovery house in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana.



In 2006, U.S. Air Force personnel from Keesler field in Biloxi, Mississippi, help build temporary units in “Volunteer Village.”

the Salvation Army, one of Habitat’s strongest allies in Gulf recovery efforts. The Salvation Army helped screen potential Habitat homeowners, bringing buyer-ready families to Gulf affiliates. In May 2006, the Salvation Army addressed one of the most pressing needs along the Gulf Coast—housing affordability—by offering at least 1,000 mortgage-assistance grants for new Habitat homeowners in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Also, to accommodate thousands of volunteers who were pouring into the Gulf, the Salvation Army and Habitat built a Volunteer Village in Biloxi,

Mississippi, that served as a central staging point for recovery workers.

“This community rebuilding effort is too big for any one person or organization to undertake alone,” the Salvation Army’s Major Dalton Cunningham said at the time.

Two years later, the Salvation Army stepped up with \$7.4 million to support Habitat’s 25th annual Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project, in communities from Houston, Texas, to Mobile, Alabama. That money provided down-payment assistance grants to 370 Habitat families, and also funded the construction or rehab of 60

houses and the framing of 48 more in Biloxi and Pascagoula. The Salvation Army also provided more than 44,000 meals to volunteers at 100 work sites during the weeklong build.

Of its \$155 million in long-term recovery funds for Louisiana and Mississippi, the Salvation Army has devoted more than half to housing, acknowledging that getting people back into stable, affordable homes is the No. 1 concern in rebuilding after a disaster.

Hedy Cibula, a retired nurse, has volunteered for years as family services manager at Pearl River County Habitat

in Picayune, Mississippi, and has witnessed time and again what a house can mean to a family in crisis.

“The house is the beginning,” Cibula said. “But it’s so much more than just a house. It’s the stability that comes with it. The most satisfying part of working with Habitat is when you really see how it changes lives.”


‘Wonders, wonders’

Getting to this point—the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina—has challenged donors to give more and pushed affiliate leaders throughout the Gulf region to do more, to be creative and to think big. Remarkably, under the most stressful conditions, there has been little turnover among the nearly two dozen affiliate executive directors.

The executive directors come from wildly different backgrounds with a huge range of skill sets. Among their ranks are former preachers and teachers, lawyers and college deans, historic preservation planners and disaster-response specialists, piano teachers and probation officers.

Many stayed where they were raised or returned after years away. The only common trait may be a sense of shared purpose—a determination not just to rebuild, but to rebuild better and faster.

Andrea Dixon, executive director of Hattiesburg Area Habitat since 2007, said there have been times when she wasn’t sure the affiliate would be able to cover payroll for the month.

“I’ve looked to the Bible more for guidance in the past year than ever before,” she said. “Constructionwise, familywise, volunteerwise, the work has been fabulous. That’s our frustration: All the pieces are there except for the money. If we could just get the money piece there, we could work wonders. Wonders, wonders, wonders.” 



Fee Boehm traveled from Chicago, Illinois, to join her daughter Katie, an AmeriCorps member, for the 2008 Carter Work Project in Gulfport, Mississippi.



Brian Moore is part of a crew from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons in Rosemont, Illinois, who volunteered to help build houses in Jefferson Parish, just across the Mississippi River from New Orleans, in the spring of 2010.



Melissa Martin, a member of the National Hockey League Players Association, works on a family’s new Habitat house in Moss Point, Mississippi, in 2009.



Nissan



Lowe's



NCAA



Dow and Square D

Gifts of time, money and

In the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, donations came from every corner of the world—from corporations, from international celebrities and sport superstars, from congregations of every faith, and from individuals who wanted to help the people of the Gulf Coast. In addition to the Salvation Army, partnerships that began or expanded in response to the 2005 disasters have continued to grow over the past five years.

Among the highlights:

- STYROFOAM™ insulation from Dow went into every Gulf Coast recovery house.
- Whirlpool donated a range and Energy Star-qualified refrigerator for each house built, and also made a \$100,000 donation to recovery efforts.
- Nissan has provided more than \$5 million in vehicles and funding, along with continuous employee volunteer support, since 2005.

- Valspar has donated thousands of gallons of paint to the Gulf Coast recovery.
- Citigroup, Freddie Mac, Bank of America, Assa Abloy and Lutheran Social Services have donated millions to build houses.
- Lowe's and its vendor partners contributed more than \$2.8 million to Gulf Coast recovery. During NBC's "Make a Difference Today" event, Lowe's provided skilled employee labor and donated all the building materials for events in New York City; Jackson, Mississippi; and Los Angeles.



Trisha Yearwood and Garth Brooks

resources

- The people of Qatar donated more than \$25 million to build 337 homes.
- Thrivent Financial for Lutherans has donated millions to build houses, and Thrivent volunteers took 50 trips to the Gulf Coast in 2007 alone.
- Managers from Schneider Electric, which provides Square D electrical products to every Habitat house built as part of the Gulf Coast recovery, contributed fencing and landscaping and built a playground, pavilion and three houses in Gautier, Mississippi, in January 2007.
- More than 800 Freddie Mac employees helped build 51 homes—representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia—on the National Mall in November 2005 that were shipped to Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama.
- A new partnership with the NAACP resulted in 45 new and repaired houses in Mississippi and Texas.

Celebrities and athletes were part of the recovery from the beginning. Among many high-profile projects:

- Oprah Winfrey, through Oprah’s Angel Network, sponsored the construction and furnishing of more than 140 houses in the Gulf states.
- Rock superstar Jon Bon Jovi funded 80 houses in Texas, Mississippi and Alabama.
- Singer Harry Connick Jr., a New Orleans native, and Grammy-winning saxophonist Branford Marsalis were honorary members of Habitat for Humanity’s Operation Home Delivery. They helped lead a long-term rebuilding plan in the New Orleans neighborhood known as Musicians’ Village.
- Country music superstars Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood joined President and Mrs. Carter in building the 1,000th post-Katrina house in New Orleans in 2007 and also built during Habitat’s Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project along the Gulf Coast in 2008.
- Stars and staff members of the National Hockey League, the National Basketball Association and Turner Network Television built houses in cities across the United States that were shipped to the Gulf Coast.
- Some 800 students, administrators and staff of the National Collegiate Athletic Association built homes with 20 families in need.
- Major League Baseball sponsored the construction of eight houses during the 2005 World Series in Houston and more than a dozen additional houses in the off-season.
- Warner Music Group, Warner Brothers Records and Nonesuch Records teamed up to record songs by Louisiana musicians and donated the sales profits to Habitat.
- NBC-TV’s “Today” show, Habitat for Humanity International and Warner Music Group joined forces in Rockefeller Plaza—renamed “Humanity Plaza” for Sept. 26-30, 2005—to build house frames around the clock for families displaced by Hurricane Katrina. The effort raised millions of dollars, and partners pledged to build 100 homes over the course of two months.

‘Everybody should do their best’

Mary Spinks Thigpen is a well-known activist in her neighborhood of Forest Heights in north Gulfport, Mississippi, where she has lived since 1972.

Even though her own house lost its roof in Hurricane Katrina, she advocated for repairs to 30 of her neighbors’ homes before applying for help herself. This summer, she moved into a brand-new house built on the slab of her demolished one, in partnership with Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

“I am used to helping others,” Thigpen said. “I am not used to being helped.”

Thigpen, 67, recently had knee replacement surgery, which has slowed her gait but not dampened her spirit. For 18 years, she has conducted free workshops for local students who want to go to college. She also serves as president of a sickle-cell



Mary Spinks Thigpen, 67, has long been an advocate for her neighborhood, Forest Heights, in north Gulfport. She worked to secure help for everyone else in the community even though she had lost her own roof in the storm.

volunteer group and is a member of an environmental action committee.

“When you die and they put you in the grave, you should be empty,” she said. “You should give all you can of what your education gave you and

what life gave you to teach and help others.

“Things haven’t always come out like I thought they should or would,” she added. “But they always come out.”



Amber and Andre Paez share their home in Troy, Alabama, with their daughter, Madelin, 8. Built early in 2008, the house marked the first blitz build for Troy-Pike Habitat for Humanity.

‘It’s home now’

When Hurricane Katrina was bearing down on Waveland, Mississippi, Andre Paez packed up his young daughter, a guitar, a few clothes and some stuffed animals and fled, first to Dallas and then to Troy, Alabama.

“Most of our family wound up here,” Paez said. “So we decided to move here and start over.”

His family expanded when he met Amber in a doctor’s waiting room. The two have now been married for more than a year, living happily with Andre’s 8-year-old daughter, Madelin, in the first house blitz-built by Troy-Pike Habitat for Humanity. In three

days, 286 volunteers—from Georgia, Alabama, Azerbaijan, Japan, China and elsewhere—built the home on what used to be an open mosquito pit.

Madelin, who was second runner-up in a recent Academic Little Miss scholarship competition, is a straight-A student—she likes math best.

Her favorite place to study is in her shockingly bright purple room, which is filled to capacity with stuffed animals.

She aspires to be either a veterinarian or “a famous baseball player.” To prepare, she has started playing shortstop on her school team.

“We’re very settled here now,” said Andre. “We’re active in the church and the community. It’s home now.”

'Nothing like coming home to your own place'

In 2005, Eddie and Celethia Edwards were raising four children in an overpriced, run-down three-bedroom apartment in Beaumont, Texas.

"The electrical wiring was so bad, sometimes the outlets would smoke," said Eddie.

When Hurricane Rita struck, the dangerous situation turned dire.

"We had to move out, because the landlord didn't have the money to fix it," said Celethia. "One child has asthma, so the mold was a big risk. We couldn't stay there."

The family went to live with Celethia's mother, who had taken in eight other people after the hurricane.

"It was a very small house, with only one bathroom," Celethia said.

Eddie is a maintenance worker, and Celethia clerks at a video store and braids hair to supplement the family income. But the rental market in Beaumont—which was brutal even before Hurricane Rita—had gotten completely out of reach.

After doing some research, they pursued a partnership with Habitat for Humanity of Jefferson County. Since April 2007, a four-bedroom house has been home.

"There is nothing like coming home to your own place," said Celethia.

This house has given everyone in the family a lot more room to dream.

Celethia wants to go to school to learn interior decorating or culinary arts. Oldest daughter Michel-la, 15, is a middle school track star who wants to earn bigger and bigger gold medals; while 13-year-old Eddie Jr., a voracious reader, is already working on the great American novel. Sabrail, 11, is a science whiz and a cheerleader who intends to be "a business lady"; and 6-year-old Timothy wants to be a football player. The newest addition to the family—4-year-old Jeremiah—shares his brother's youthful passion for football and all other sports.



Eddie Edwards provides a shoulder for his 4-year-old son, Jeremiah. Edwards is a maintenance man, and his wife, Celethia, is a clerk at a video store.



Dominiece Honore, her 4-year-old brother, Jalen, and their family lost everything but a few days' worth of clothes when Hurricane Katrina destroyed their home in New Orleans' 9th Ward.

'We basically started our life all over again'

Jason Honore and his wife, Krystle, lost everything but a few days' worth of clothes and some jewelry when Hurricane Katrina destroyed their home in New Orleans' 9th Ward.

The hardest part of the months and years that followed was sending their daughter, Dominiece, then only 5, to live with her grandmother in Baton Rouge so she could attend school regularly.

Five years later, the whole family—which includes little brothers Jason, 8, and Jalen, 4—lives happily under one roof in Slidell, Louisiana.

"It was eventually part of my plan to own a house," Honore said. "But it wouldn't have happened this soon without Habitat."

Just before Katrina struck, the Honores evacuated to Mississippi and then spent the next year moving from hotel to apartment back to hotel. Eventually, they wanted to get back to Louisiana, where their extended families live.

"This neighborhood is peaceful and quiet," Honore said. "Everybody's friendly."

Honore, 28, drives a shuttle bus for a living, while Krystle works in a phlebotomy lab. She was a cashier before, Honore said proudly, but she went to school to learn a skill.

The family's year in exile was hardest on the children, Honore said.

"My oldest son hadn't started school yet, but we were trying to keep my daughter's education on track," he said. "So we had to send her to her mother's parents to go to school in Baton Rouge. We were separated as a family for a while."

His voice gets quieter when he talks about that difficult time. He would much rather talk about today.

"Now they're all doing fine," he said. "We basically started our life all over again."

'It has been a new beginning'

Deanna Narcisse, 34, is a waitress at the Waffle House in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. The restaurant is a popular community gathering place, and Narcisse is an articulate, vocal advocate for Gulf Coast recovery efforts in general and Habitat for Humanity's role in particular.

"I am always telling people about Habitat," Narcisse



Deanna Narcisse is a waitress at the Waffle House in downtown Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. For months after Hurricane Katrina destroyed her rental home, Narcisse lived with relatives and then in a FEMA trailer, but she had to send her children, Devon, 18, and Deara, 15, to Lafayette so they could attend school. Now they are united under one roof.

said, laughing. "I really hate to say, 'Thank goodness for the storm.' But I wouldn't have this house otherwise. It has been a new beginning."

Narcisse and her two children—son Devon, now 18, and daughter Deara, 15—had to live apart for months after Hurricane Katrina destroyed their rental home.

Deanna lived with relatives and then in a FEMA trailer, but she had to send her children to Lafayette so they could attend school. Since March 2009, all three have lived under one roof, in a home that has become a popular after-school hangout for her children and their friends.

"There are so many things they could be doing, getting in trouble," Narcisse said, sitting on the front porch while half a dozen teenagers lounged around the TV set inside. "I don't mind them all coming here every day if they want. It's a good, safe environment for them."

Narcisse's son, Devon, is a straight-A high school senior and a star on the school's championship basketball team. He plans to attend the University of Southern Mississippi.

Daughter Deara, also a good student, serves as manager of her brother's basketball team.

"This is something I never thought I would have," Narcisse said of her house. "I just really enjoy coming home."

'Why not try?'

When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, Travis Cheatum had just graduated from high school. His family evacuated to Shreveport and then to Houston, then back to Shreveport and back to Houston. Having lost everything he owned, the laid-back young man found himself rootless and distracted.

"Everything happens for a reason," he said, flashing an easy smile.

Cheatum, now 23, was on track to become a firefighter after finishing high school. During months of displacement, though, he began rethinking his career course.

"I always liked cooking," he said. "My grandma always had me in the kitchen. But I never thought I could make a living at it. After Katrina, I thought: Why not try?"

Two years ago, Cheatum got a job as a banquet chef at NOLA restaurant in New Orleans. The next step was to fulfill another youthful dream—owning his own home. This summer, construction was under way in Jefferson Parish.



Travis Cheatum, 23, was a high school student when Hurricane Katrina swamped his family's home in New Orleans. Now a banquet chef at NOLA, one of Emeril Lagasse's signature restaurants, Cheatum is helping to build his own house in Jefferson Parish.



Nineteen-year-old Aaron Pavolini stands near the entrance to his grandmother's Habitat house in Picayune, Mississippi. The family lost everything they owned when Hurricane Katrina demolished their mobile home in Gulfport. After suffering health problems and emotional stress while living in temporary housing, Aaron and his three siblings are thriving now.

'Living here has made the difference'

Dianne Pavolini and her grandchildren lost everything they owned when Hurricane Katrina demolished their double-wide mobile home in Gulfport, Mississippi. They moved to Picayune, Mississippi, and have started a new life in their own home, built in partnership with Pearl River County Habitat for Humanity.

After suffering health problems and emotional stress while living in temporary housing, all the children are doing well: Aaron, 19, recently graduated from high school; Aidan, 17, is completing National Guard youth camp; little sisters Athina, 9, and Alivia, 4, play happily with other children on the street where eight other Habitat partner families live.

Before moving in during the summer of 2009, Pavolini and her three grandchildren (Alivia came later) had survived a real-life nightmare during Hurricane Katrina—at one point seeking refuge on the highest green of a flooded golf course.

The family spent nine months in a FEMA trailer designed for

one occupant. It eventually was condemned, and the family moved into a rent-subsidized house for a year and a half.

Pavolini, the primary caregiver for her four grandchildren, was a waitress for years until she got emphysema and had to take disability.

"I don't know where we would be living now if we didn't have this house," she said. "God is so good. We love our home."

Aaron, who takes his role as big brother very seriously, has his sights on Pearl River Community College, where he wants to earn a degree in computer programming before going to ITT Tech in St. Rose, Louisiana.

"At the beginning of the year I was struggling," Aaron said. "But now my grades are good."

"Living here has made the difference," he said. "When I moved schools, they weren't learning the same stuff we were learning. It caused me a lot of trouble. I never learned how to write in cursive because I switched schools so often in middle school."

'We'll always be connected'

Unsure of where to go—and unable to afford a hotel room—Kimberley Stewart waited too late to evacuate as Hurricane Katrina bore down on New Orleans East. She and her daughter, Kennedy, had to be rescued by boat and ended up on a bus bound for the Cajundome in Lafayette, where 10,000 other displaced people were seeking shelter.

Stewart accepted an offer of help in Dawsonville, Georgia, where members of the Father's House church set the two up in an apartment, provided a used car and helped Stewart get a job. After living in Dawsonville for two years, the pull of home became too great, and they returned to Louisiana.

In August 2009, Stewart and her daughter moved into their new Habitat home in Mandeville, just across Lake Pontchartrain from Harrah's Casino, where Stewart works.

Kennedy, now a sixth-grader, can ride her bike to school, where her best subjects are spelling and English. She still goes to visit her best friend in Dawsonville every summer, and her friend's whole family came down for Mardi Gras this year.

"We'll always be connected," Stewart said.



Kennedy Stewart and her mother, Kimberley, lost everything to Hurricane Katrina, surviving a dramatic rescue and then more than two years of displacement.

The Way For



Pat Hebard, a 60-year-old survivor of cancer, relocated from New Orleans to Lafayette Parish, Louisiana, when she moved into her own Habitat home, built in partnership with the nation of Qatar. “Everybody wants to own a piece of something,” Hebard says. “I just wish everybody who’s ever been through hard times could go through an experience like this and have their own home at the end of it.”

“It’s not all about building a house. It’s about building a foundation for a family.”

—Hedy Cibula, family services manager at George County (Mississippi) Habitat for Humanity

No one on the Gulf Coast has forgotten all that was lost five years ago. But after the worst disasters, the most precious commodity is a normal life, when parents go back to work and children resume a regular childhood.

Free from worry about where the family will live, the children and parents of Habitat families throughout the region have begun to dream about the future again.

Little Madelin Paez, a straight-A student in Troy, Alabama, plans to be either a veterinarian or a “famous

ward

baseball player.” La Donna Locke, a seventh-grader in Mobile, wants to be a model or a chef, while little brother Jaylen has his eye on a career in professional wrestling.

Lavinsky Washington, 7, is teaching his grandparents to speak Spanish in their new home in Houston, Texas. Eddie Edwards Jr., 13, is an aspiring short-story writer in Beaumont.

In Covington, Louisiana, homeowner Kimberley Stewart is going back to school part time in the fall to finish her degree in counseling. Also in Covington, 21-year-old Krystal Velez, daughter of homeowner Joy Velez, already has a job offer to teach at her old high school in Chalmette as soon as she graduates.

Tyra Brown, 9, wants to be a doctor in Baton Rouge, and Mykenzie Butler, 9, in Lake Charles, wants to be either a teacher or a singer. In Thibodaux, Louisiana, 20-year-old Journell Trahan is living with his mom while he returns to school and pursues a football career.

Writing a new story

In recent months, a massive oil spill has threatened the wetlands, marshes and coastlines—and the future—of the same communities that are still rebounding from the 2005 hurricanes.

Five years after the deadliest hurricane season in U.S. history, the looming oil threat underscores the exhausting nature of lasting, long-term recovery.

Donna Fischer, executive director of Pearl River County (Mississippi) Habitat for Humanity, said the spill has stirred up dreadful memories and fears among survivors in a fragile environment.

“It’s a very weird feeling down here right now,” Fischer said. “People are having flashbacks to the storms. Kids, especially, are really struggling with this.”

The Gulf Coast is an easy place to love, with its rich history, laid-back culture and raw natural beauty. But it has never been an especially easy place to live. Hurricanes and



Nine-year-old Destiny Jackson and her mother, Deirdre, a schoolteacher, lived in New Orleans East before losing everything to Hurricane Katrina. “We had nothing to go back to,” says Deirdre, who has resettled in Jackson, Mississippi, in a house built in partnership with Metro Jackson Habitat for Humanity.

floods are a way of life here, and each disaster teaches the survivors something new about building back safer and stronger.

Since the storm, new programs have expanded Habitat’s outreach and broadened the scope of the recovery work. And now, affiliate leaders dream of a future with even more impact.

Chris Monforton, chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, said, “Katrina is not our focus anymore. It’s part of our story, but it’s not our focus. That doesn’t mean there aren’t immediate needs or that we don’t continue to work with urgency. But we’re writing a new story.”

For Monforton’s affiliate, that will mean scaling back on new construction and ramping up programs of owner-occupied rehab and hazard mitigation—making existing houses more structurally sound and hurricane-resistant.

Such fortification also addresses what many affiliate

Q&A

with
Jonathan Reckford
Chief executive officer

'Stronger than before'

Jonathan Reckford was named CEO of Habitat for Humanity International on Aug. 4, 2005, and was set to begin his official duties Sept. 5. On Aug. 29, Hurricane Katrina altered the landscape of the U.S. Gulf Coast and the future of Habitat. In his Atlanta office, Reckford reflected on how the disaster response has affected his first five years on the job.

Q: *When did you visit the Gulf Coast for the first time after Katrina?*

JR: About six weeks after, we did a build in Covington (Louisiana). Looking back, those first two houses we built—one in Slidell and one in Covington—were tremendously important. Even though they were just two houses, it was putting a stake in the ground to say that there was hope for these communities and we were going to build back.

Q: *Was there a moment when you first felt really hopeful about the Gulf recovery efforts?*

JR: There were a series of moments—the first in Covington, when the whole community came together to build. Then the Rockefeller Plaza build (in New York City) and the build on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Those extraordinary moments showed the level of energy and passion around the country, from people wanting to make a difference. I talked at a fundraiser for Twin Cities Habitat (in Minneapolis, Minnesota) in the early days and started waxing poetic, saying, “Wouldn’t it be great to send a barge down the Mississippi River with homes-in-a-box to our brothers and sisters there?” Within days, someone had donated barge space, someone else had donated transportation, and we were laying plans to send homes-in-a-box down the Mississippi.

Q: *What are your most memorable images of the recovery efforts?*

JR: One of my favorite moments was when we were dedicating a house in the Musicians’ Village (in New Orleans), and across the street some neighbors were fixing up their house. That was one of those signals that people were starting to believe. People were starting to come back and work on fixing up their own homes.



leaders believe is the highest hurdle to homeownership in the Gulf now: insurance rates that are as much as five times higher than before Katrina. Houses that are retrofitted to hurricane-resistant standards often are eligible for lower premiums.

The goal is to be true to the Habitat mission, Monforton said, while being nimble and creative enough to serve more people in very difficult circumstances.

“What is the unmet need?” Monforton said. “What remains to be done? That’s what we’re always trying to determine.”

Building in a recession

Habitat for Humanity is not a typical homebuilder, but it operates in the same economic environment as all the others. That Habitat has ramped up its production over the past five years is even more remarkable in the wider context of the times.

The State of the Nation’s Housing 2010, prepared by the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, paints a bleak picture overall: “The nation has not faced housing problems of this magnitude since the Great Depression. Heavy job losses and lingering high unemployment rates have increased housing insecurity for millions of families.”

According to the report, nearly one in four renter households had severe cost burdens in 2008—spending more than half of their income on housing—compared with roughly one in eight owner households. And nearly half of renters—but a third of owners—had at least moderate cost burdens (spending 30 percent to 50 percent of their income on housing).

The implosion of the U.S. housing market has not resulted in more

Continued on page 34



Joy Velez moved into her Habitat house in Covington, Louisiana, two days before Christmas 2008. Situated on a cul de sac surrounded by towering trees, Velez knows everybody on the street and has seemingly unlimited stories to share about how the neighbors pitch in to take care of one another. She has rebuilt her life on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, working at the Habitat ReStore and proudly sending her daughter, Krystal, to college in Lake Charles.

affordable homes for everybody, largely because it has been offset by a stagnant economy and rising costs for necessities such as gasoline and groceries, coupled with sinking incomes and high unemployment.

The U.S. government has passed several economic development and stimulus packages, including the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, that have allowed Habitat affiliates to maintain the pace of their work as they explore new funding options.

Other grants through Habitat for Humanity International have helped affiliates weather the economic storm without cutting back on building.

The recession also has pushed more affiliates to diversify their programs—adding rehabs and weatherization projects to new construction, for instance. NSP funding has provided a crucial cushion, said Susan Wolfe, development director at Metro Jackson Habitat. But no one is counting on such funds forever.

“We’re already thinking beyond the cushion,” Wolfe said. “What are we going to do when that’s over? We’re always looking ahead.”



New homeowner Larry Washington accepts the gift of a toolbox from one of more than 200 volunteers who helped build his home and others on spring break 2010 in New Orleans. Washington, a furniture delivery man, was emotional at the dedication of his family’s house: “God is good,” he told the assembled volunteers. “Y’all are good.”

Q&A with Jonathan Reckford

Q: *When Katrina struck, Habitat was already deeply involved in responding to the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Did you ever feel overwhelmed by the work ahead?*

JR: We had gone through a pretty difficult time at Habitat, with the founder leaving and some other challenges. The tsunami and Katrina forced us to step away from the pain and grief that had been lingering and just move forward. It was one of those rallying times. The response was quite extraordinary. We were really blessed with some extra help. I knew we didn't have the depth to manage Katrina and keep everything else going, so I looked for help. Ken Meinert and Bill Collins were both construction industry CEOs who dropped everything and came down to put Operation Home Delivery into place. (Meinert was senior vice president of Operation Home Delivery, and Collins was senior vice president of collaborative alliances, working to build strategic partnerships in the Gulf.) There were countless heroes, but having that focused team leadership was absolutely crucial.

The danger with these big disasters—and we see it now with Haiti—is that if you're not careful, you respond to the disaster but the whole rest of the world gets ignored. Our goal is to mount a really significant response without derailing the rest of the strategic plan.

Q: *What are the legacies from Katrina?*

JR: One of the most powerful lessons is that Habitat *can* scale. We can do high-quality, transformational work—and do more of it. One of the things I'm most proud of is the capacity that's been built at all the Gulf affiliates. ... It's the same with the tsunami. Look at Thailand. Habitat leaders there were helping a couple of hundred families a year before the tsunami. Now they're helping 1,500 families *per year* because they put systems, people and structures in place to sustain that growth.

In the United States, the Mississippi Gulf Coast affiliate is a wonderful example. Two affiliates that were building three to five houses a year merged, and now it is the largest-producing affiliate in the United States.

Another thing a disaster can do is give you permission to try things that you wouldn't necessarily do. We learned a lot about partnership. The story of the Gulf response is all about partnerships.

continued on page 35

'People know our work'

Habitat's visibility on the Gulf Coast after Katrina has established it not only as a housing expert but also as a universally recognized symbol of hope.

Tonja Murphy, family services director at Metro Jackson Habitat, said name recognition has helped that affiliate grow to meet the area's needs through difficult economic times.

"People know our work," Murphy said. "They know what we can do. A lot of people have said, 'If I'm going to give to an organization, I'm going to give to Habitat, because I *know* what they're doing.'"

In Mobile, Alabama, Brenda Carson Lawless has been executive director of Habitat in Mobile County since 2004, but had served as a volunteer board member and family selection committee member since 1995. She has watched Habitat's profile grow dramatically over the years.

"I went to a meeting recently of Partners in Environmental Progress," she said. "Prior to the storm, I would go to that kind of function and introduce myself to as many people as I could. But at this event, I was amazed at the number of people who saw my name badge and came up *to me* to talk about all the good things they hear about Habitat."

In addition to building houses, Habitat in Mobile County is part of a regional housing resource center and a referral service, both of which help people find the housing solution that best suits their needs.



Four-year-old Alivia Pavolini and her three older siblings can now play with the children in their Picayune, Mississippi, neighborhood, where eight other Habitat partner families live.

“We can only build so many houses a year,” Lawless said. “But we *serve* so many more families through the referral service and the housing resource center.”

The Mobile affiliate also has been invited to participate in an economic impact study by the regional planning commission. “We’ve never been asked before,” Lawless said. “They see us as an important player now.”

The ripple effect of hope

About 164 miles northeast of Mobile, the city of Dothan suffered no damage from Katrina, but the storm made a direct hit on the city’s affordable housing market. Huge FEMA trailer parks surrounded Dothan, raising the question among affiliate leaders about how to accommodate any of those people who chose to stay long term.

Elizabeth Tiller has been at Wiregrass Habitat for Humanity in Dothan for nearly nine years.

“After Katrina, we learned a lot about our area,” Tiller said. “We took a hard look at the existing housing stock and realized that we really needed some type of rehab program. We didn’t have the funding or the families to go out and build a lot of new houses. But we needed to fix what was already there. The need was greater even than we thought.”

Wiregrass Habitat celebrated its 20th anniversary in May 2010 by launching an ongoing project called Paint Dothan, sprucing up 20 houses initially and expanding as quickly as funding allows. A full-scale rehab program will offer projects ranging from simple weatherization to brand-new roofs.

continued on page 37



Serenity Hebard sits on the lap of Melinda Taylor, executive director of Lafayette Habitat for Humanity. While her mother works, Serenity often stays with her grandmother, Habitat homeowner Pat Hebard.

Q&A with Jonathan Reckford

Q: What are your greatest hopes for the people of the Gulf?

JR: I was hoping this year we would be *celebrating* and really thinking about the world becoming normal. The tragedy right now is that this oil spill has created this cloud over communities that were really just starting to get a sense of being fully restored and energized.

My hope for any community that’s hit by disaster is that the rebuilt community is *stronger* than before. That was our goal for the tsunami victims, and it’s certainly our goal now in Haiti—that we don’t just build back, but in fact we build back better. The hard truth is, there were a lot of very poor communities in the Gulf and a lot of

challenges before the storms. The storms just revealed and exacerbated some of those challenges.

Q: None of the Gulf affiliates seem to be talking about going back to lower production levels, do they?

JR: I think that’s what is most exciting. They may not sustain their peak level, because we may not have the financing, but they have become a force for *housing* in the community instead of just building a few houses. In the history of Habitat, the Gulf recovery effort will be one of those defining periods for us.

In the past, we’ve seen affiliates say, “We can’t build more than one house a year.” Our response is always, “You *can*. You just can’t do it the way you’re doing it right now.” It’s nice to have examples to point to of what *is* possible.

Q&A

with Larry Gluth

Senior vice president,
U.S./Canada
field operations

'We accomplished what we said we would do'



Larry Gluth, now senior vice president of field operations in the United States and Canada, was a volunteer and former board president of Habitat for Humanity of East King County in Seattle in 2005. He took a sabbatical from Starbucks Coffee Co. to lead Operation Home Delivery, Habitat's disaster recovery program.

Q: *What do you remember most about the early recovery efforts in the Gulf? How daunting was the challenge of rebuilding?*

LG: Materials were hard to come by, as shortages and price increases for building materials soared. Managing volunteers was also a challenge, as there were few places for them to stay. Volunteer camps were established to address those needs.

An additional challenge was that Habitat was not a very well-known entity in that region before the storms, so we were not top-of-mind for local officials as they began their

planning. A lot of early work was simply setting up meetings with local mayors, regional and state officials, to educate them about our work and that we would be a major player in the rebuilding efforts.

Q: *What are you most proud of about Habitat's work in the Gulf over the past five years?*

LG: We accomplished what we said we would do. Thousands of families were served, the capacity of local affiliates was increased, and the Operation Home Delivery team came in to support local affiliates for a couple of years and then got out of their hair. Several of the Operation Home Delivery staff were hired by local affiliates to carry on the work.

Q: *What do you think is most important for Habitat for Humanity supporters—volunteers and donors—to know about the Gulf Coast recovery?*

LG: Habitat's ability to build capacity and achieve incredible things is

limited by only one thing: that being access to capital. When funding is provided for Habitat's work, great things happen and communities are positively changed forever.

Q: *What are the most important lessons learned from the hurricane response?*

LG: Our disaster-response efforts need to be swift and decisive. We now have a growing base of knowledge in how to deal with disasters and should be represented early in discussions relative to rebuilding communities affected by natural disasters.

Q: *Moving forward, how important is disaster response/mitigation to Habitat's overall mission?*

LG: It's important to who we are in the communities in which we live, and also a wonderful opportunity to showcase Habitat as one of the world's premier nonprofit organizations, particularly for stewardship and achieving results.

continued from page 35

Less than an hour northwest of Dothan, Troy-Pike Habitat for Humanity exemplifies the spirit that has taken hold at many affiliates throughout the Gulf states. Now that the leaders have seen what's possible—with limited staff and scarce resources—no goal seems out of reach.

Fred Johnson, a former webmaster and car-radio marketer, started as an AmeriCorps VISTA member at Troy-Pike Habitat in 2007. In August 2009, he became the affiliate's first executive director and only paid staff member.

In the 10 years before Katrina, Troy-Pike built six houses. In the five years since Katrina, it has built five. Looking forward, Johnson said the plans are to build two in 2011, three in 2012 and then three a year afterward.

Troy-Pike had its first blitz build in 2008, completing in one week a house for the Paez family—Amber and Andre and their 8-year-old daughter, Madelin.

“All the houses we build are great,” Johnson said. “But this one is always going to be special to me. It was our first blitz build, and it really started our fire. Now we're planning our first apostle build—going to 12 local churches to come up with the \$60,000 we need to build a house. I am so excited about it, I can't even sleep. I am on fire.”


The foundation is built

The numbers can be daunting, as so many families still need a decent, affordable place to live before they can start having such ordinary dreams. In Thibodaux alone, some 800 people have applied for a home, according to Jarrett Hawkins, executive director of Bayou Area Habitat for Humanity.

“There's a tremendous need,” Hawkins said. “We only wish we could do more than we're doing already.”

“Our donors believe in the mission of Habitat. They believe in enabling individuals to succeed. That will always resonate.”

Julie Giordano, executive director of Calcasieu Area Habitat for Humanity in Lake Charles, Louisiana, for a year and a half, also sees an enormous need.

“There are just so many people who are exhausted,” she said. “And a lot of people don't understand the need to fund *building* five years later. What they don't realize is that now we've built the foundation to do something—to make real change.” 



Angel Campo rides a bicycle in front of her family's Habitat home in Slidell, Louisiana. Angel and her two older brothers, Nate and Ryan, suffered asthma attacks and rashes while living in a FEMA trailer in Lafayette Parish. All are healthy now.



Members of the Warren family survey their new neighborhood of Umland Park in Houston, Texas, which was built as part of the 2008 Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project.



Volunteers raise the wall on a new home in New Orleans East. More than 2,500 people attending the 2008 NBA All-Star Game, along with NBA All-Stars, former NBA players and celebrities participated in projects throughout New Orleans for the "NBA Cares Day of Service."

Long-term need

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita taught us a lot about disaster response and about ourselves as an organization. We must act immediately when disaster strikes, but our most important role is to lead a long-term, sustainable rebuilding effort.

Five years and 2,200 homes later, we still have much work to do along the Gulf Coast. We're building communities—and retrofitting others—that are stronger, more energy-efficient and better equipped to weather the next storm.

We still need your help—in the Gulf states, in Haiti and elsewhere. Every anniversary gives us a chance to reflect on what we've done and to recharge for the work ahead. And every donation makes us better prepared to respond to the worst catastrophes.

Thank you for your continued support.

Kip Scheidler

senior director for
global disaster response
Habitat for Humanity International

■ *To donate to Habitat for Humanity's Disaster Response program or to learn more, go to habitat.org/disaster.*

■ *If you're interested in volunteering with Habitat's Gulf Coast affiliates, please contact them directly to learn about opportunities.*

Contact information

Alabama

■ **Habitat for Humanity in Mobile County**
 P.O. Box 16422
 Mobile, AL 36616
 Brenda Carson Lawless, executive director
blawless@habitatmobile.org
 251-476-7171
www.habitatmobile.org

■ **Troy-Pike Habitat for Humanity**
 203 East St.
 Troy, AL 36081
 Fred Johnson, executive director
info@troypikehabitat.com
 334-372-7578

■ **Wiregrass Habitat for Humanity**
 1227 Headland Ave.
 Dothan, AL 36303
 Elizabeth Tiller, executive director
etiller@wiregrasshabitat.org
 334-792-8453
www.wiregrasshabitat.org

Louisiana

■ **Bayou Area Habitat for Humanity**
 1087 Highway 3185
 Thibodaux, LA 70301
 985-447-6999
www.bayouhabitat.org

■ **Calcasieu Area Habitat for Humanity**
 P.O. Box 638
 Lake Charles, LA 70602
 Julie Giordano, executive director
Julie@hfca.org
 337-497-0129
www.angelfire.com/blues/CalcasieuAreaHfH

■ **East St. Tammany Habitat for Humanity**
 1066 Front St.
 Slidell, LA 70458
 Debbie Crouch, executive director
ex_director@esthfh.org
 985-639-0656
www.esthfh.org

■ **Ginger Ford Habitat for Humanity**
 955 S. Morrison Blvd.
 Hammond, LA 70404
 Patti Giannoble, executive director
pattig@i-55.com
 985-542-6866

■ **Habitat for Humanity of Greater Baton Rouge**
 4962 Florida Blvd., Suite 409
 Baton Rouge, LA 70806
 Lynn Clark, executive director
lynn@habitatbrla.org
 225-927-6651, ext. 217
www.habitatbr.org

■ **Lafayette Habitat for Humanity**
 714 Johnston St.
 Lafayette, LA 70501
 Melinda Taylor, executive director
Melinda@habitatlafayette.org
 337-261-5041
www.habitatlafayette.org

■ **New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity**
 7100 St. Charles Ave.
 New Orleans, LA 70118
 Jim Pate, executive director
jimp@habitat-nola.org
 504-861-2077
www.habitat-nola.org

■ **Habitat for Humanity St. Tammany West**
 1400 North Lane
 Mandeville, LA 70471
 Jeff St. Romain, president/CEO
jstromain@habitatstw.org
 985-893-3172
www.habitatstw.org

■ **Washington Habitat for Humanity**
 940 Lee St.
 Franklinton, LA 70438
 John Herring, president
Jherring78@hotmail.com
 985-516-1286

Mississippi

■ **Bay-Waveland Habitat for Humanity**
 414 Highway 90
 Bay St. Louis, MS 39520
 Wendy McDonald, executive director
wmcDonald@habitatbw.org
 228-467-9699, ext. 106
www.habitatbaywaveland.org

■ **George County Habitat for Humanity**
 52 Virginia St.
 Lucedale, MS 39452
 Sue Trosclair, executive director
gchabitat@bellsouth.net
 601-766-0730

■ **Hattiesburg Area Habitat for Humanity**
 5191 Highway 42
 Hattiesburg, MS 39401
 Andrea Dixon, executive director
adixon@hattiesburghabitat.org
 601-582-4663, ext. 11
www.hattiesburghabitat.org

■ **Metro Jackson Habitat for Humanity**
 P.O. Box 55634
 Jackson, MS 39296
 Cindy Griffin, executive director
cgriffin@habitatjackson.org
 601-353-6060, ext. 209
www.habitatjackson.org

■ **Lauderdale County Habitat for Humanity**
 1001 29th Ave.
 Meridian, MS 39301
 Fonda Rush, executive director
fonda@netdoor.com
 601-485-4992

■ **Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast**
 1636 Popps Ferry Road
 Biloxi, MS 39532
 Chris Monforton, executive director
cmonforton@hfhmgc.org
 228-314-0011, ext. 320
www.hfhmgc.org

■ **Pearl River County Habitat for Humanity**
 325 N. Haugh St.
 Picayune, MS 39466
 Donna Fischer, executive director
hoffisch@aol.com
 601-799-4636

Texas

■ **Houston Habitat for Humanity**
 3750 N. McCarty St.
 Houston, Texas 77029
 Algenita Davis, executive director
adavis@HoustonHabitat.org
 713-671-9993, ext. 244

■ **Jefferson County Habitat for Humanity**
 610 Trinity St.
 Beaumont, Texas 77701
 Uliana Trylowsky, executive director
uliana@beaumonthabitat.org
 409-832-5853

KATRINA & RITA: FIVE YEARS LATER



Sources

Primary sources:

Main interviews for this report were conducted with affiliate leaders, volunteers and homeowner families March 12-26 and April 15-22, 2010, in Dothan, Mobile and Troy, Alabama; Baton Rouge, Bogalusa, Covington, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Mandeville, New Orleans, Slidell and Thibodaux, Louisiana; Bay St. Louis, Biloxi, Gulfport, Hattiesburg, Jackson, Lucedale, Meridian, Pascagoula, Picayune and Waveland, Mississippi; and Beaumont and Houston, Texas.

Other sources:

Greater New Orleans Community Data Center: www.gnocdc.org

"Katrina Evacuees: Who They Are, Where They Are and How They're Faring" by Jeffrey A. Groen and Anne E. Polivka (2008): www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2008/03/art3full.pdf

New OrleansTimes-Picayune archives: www.nola.com/katrina

"Post-Katrina Recovery of the Housing Market Along the Mississippi Gulf Coast" by Kevin F. McCarthy and Mark Hanson: rand.org/pubs/technical_reports

RAND Gulf States Policy Institute: www.rand.org/gulf-states

"Rebuilding Housing Along the Mississippi Gulf Coast: Ideas for Ensuring an Adequate Supply of Affordable Housing" by Mark A. Bernstein, Julie Kim, Paul Sorensen, Mark Hanson, Adrian Overton and Scott Hiromoto: www.rand.org/pubs/occasional

"Social Vulnerability and Migration in the Wake of Disaster: The Case of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita" by Candice Myers: etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-04042007-090939/unrestricted/MyersThesis.pdf

"The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe" by David Brunzma, David Overfelt and Steve Picou (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

Hazards & Vulnerability Research Institute at the University of South Carolina: webra.cas.sc.edu/hvri/

U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program: www.census.gov/popest/estimates.html

"Where is the Money?" by Douglas Ahlers, Allison Plyer and Frederick Weil (January 2008): gnocdc.s3.amazonaws.com/reports/HurricaneFundingGap.pdf

KATRINA & RITA: FIVE YEARS LATER

Recovery by the Numbers



Homeowner-to-be Celestine Torres lifts her hammer at an Operation Home Delivery build in Jackson, Mississippi, on Sept. 26, 2005.



In November 2006—less than 15 months after Katrina and Rita—walls are raised on Habitat's 500th hurricane recovery home, in Mobile County, Alabama.



The 1,000th hurricane recovery house goes up in St. Bernard Parish in May 2007.

6

Weeks after Katrina when Habitat's Operation Home Delivery began construction on its first hurricane-response house.

10

Top 10 private homebuilders in Louisiana since Katrina have included Habitat affiliates in New Orleans, East St. Tammany and St. Tammany West.

57

Before Katrina, all the Gulf Coast affiliates combined built about 57 houses per year.

400

Since Katrina, the Gulf Coast affiliates have built, repaired or rehabbed more than 400 a year.

500

Habitat began building its 500th hurricane-response house, in Mobile, Alabama, in November 2006.

994

Repairs of houses completed through grants of \$4 million from Church World Services and \$524,000 from RebuildingTogether.

1,000

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, helped raise the walls on house No. 1,000 in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, in May 2007.

2,219

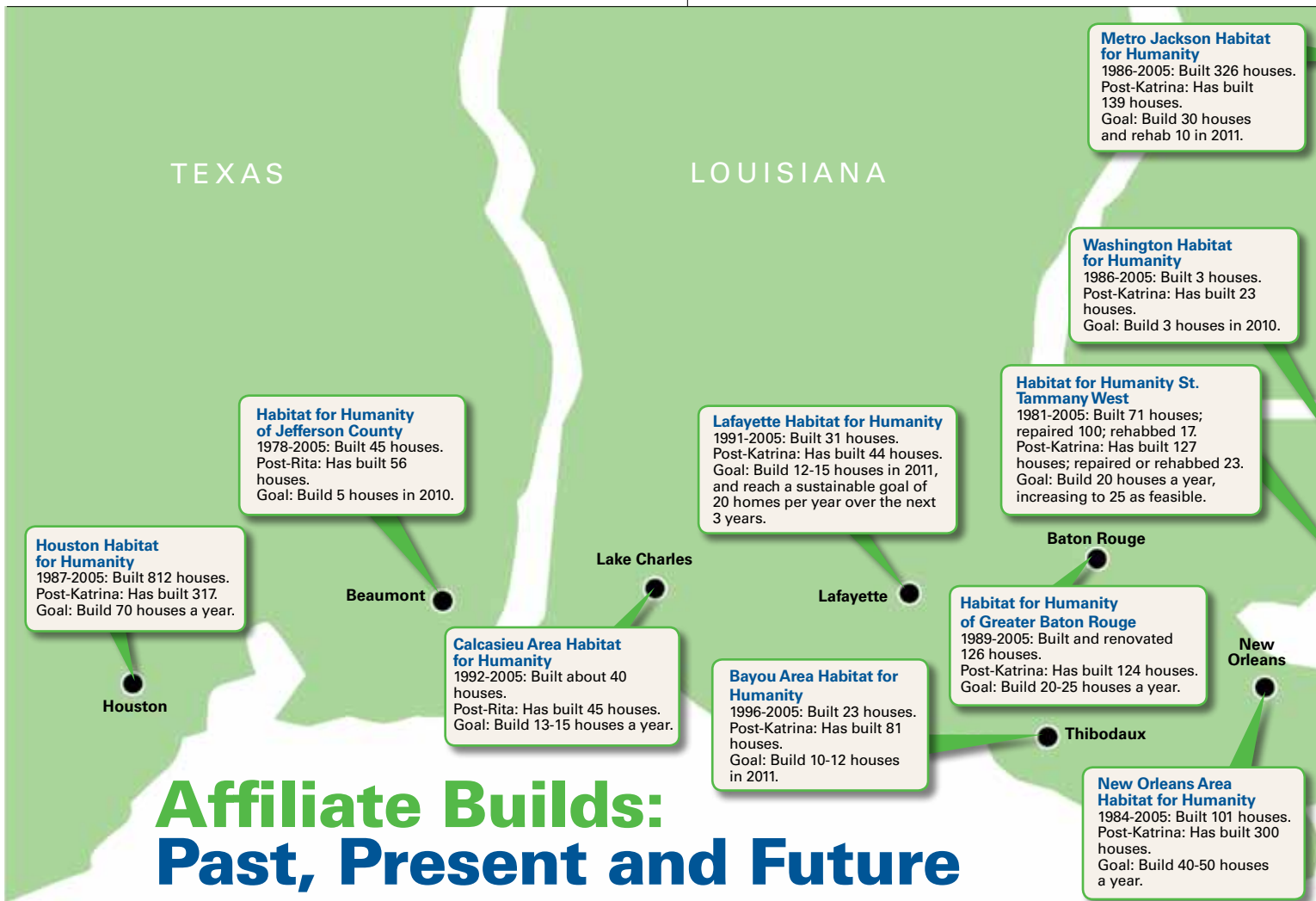
Total number of Habitat houses built since 2005 as part of hurricane recovery.

2,500

Habitat volunteers removed debris and cleaned more than 2,500 homes in preparation for rehabbing.

150,000

Estimated number of volunteers who have helped rebuilding efforts in New Orleans alone.



Affiliate Builds: Past, Present and Future

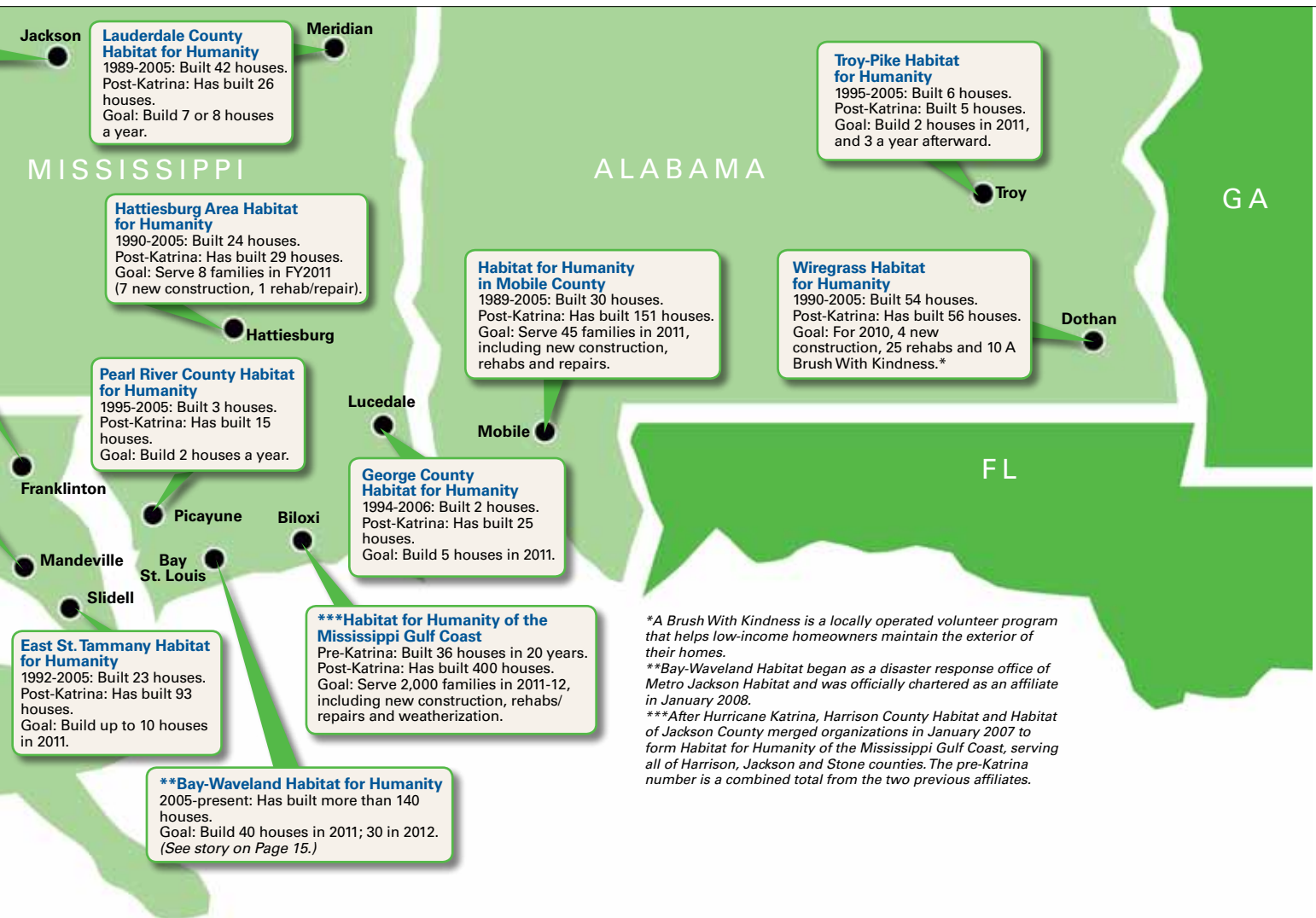
Since the hurricanes of 2005, Habitat for Humanity has built, repaired or rehabilitated more than 2,200 houses throughout the U.S. Gulf Coast. In Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Texas, Habitat affiliates have increased their building capacity to serve exponentially more families in dire need of decent, affordable housing.



TEXAS: Celethia and Eddie Edwards and their five children share a four-bedroom home in Beaumont.



LOUISIANA: Kimberley Stewart and her daughter, Kennedy, have lived in a Habitat home in Covington since August 2009.



**A Brush With Kindness is a locally operated volunteer program that helps low-income homeowners maintain the exterior of their homes.
 **Bay-Waveland Habitat began as a disaster response office of Metro Jackson Habitat and was officially chartered as an affiliate in January 2008.
 ***After Hurricane Katrina, Harrison County Habitat and Habitat of Jackson County merged organizations in January 2007 to form Habitat for Humanity of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, serving all of Harrison, Jackson and Stone counties. The pre-Katrina number is a combined total from the two previous affiliates.*



MISSISSIPPI: Stacey Loftin and family (including Kirsten, 14) share a green "superhouse" in Bay St. Louis, built to the highest eco-friendly standards.



ALABAMA: Modular houses built elsewhere and delivered to Dothan have become homes for family in need.



INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS:
121 Habitat St. Americus, GA 31709-3498 USA
229-924-6935 800-HABITAT fax 229-928-8811
publicinfo@habitat.org habitat.org

3.5M/CS/7-10