Louisiana's Unsung Heroes

LOUISIANA Spirit

HURRICANE RECOVERY

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Table of Contents

Dianna Drake, St. Tammany ..... page 4
Margaret Baham, Tangipahoa ..... page 5
Karen and Charles Graves, St. Helena ..... page 6
Nat Williams, St. Helena ..... page 7
Stephen Parrill, Livingston ..... page 8
Michael Brown, St. Tammany ..... page 9
Debbie Meyers, Tangipahoa ..... page 10
Brinda Normand, Washington ..... page 11
Tom Descant, Washington ..... page 12
Lynda Deniger, St. Tammany ..... page 13
Martha Raiford, St. Helena ..... page 14
Bill Ritchie, Washington ..... page 15
Jody Herrington, John Gillespie, Victor Zagorski, Chris Wages, Buford Rose, Ryan Meadows, Felicia Kelleher, Hailey Lotz, Joseph Boyle, Christopher William, Daniel Moore, Brennie Monette, Sam Constantine & Melissa Berry, St. Tammany ..... page 16
Tineka Heard, Livingston ..... page 17
Kathy and George Martin, Washington ..... page 18
Marla Meadors, St. Tammany ..... page 19
St. Tammany ..... page 20
Myrna Jordan, Tangipahoa ..... page 21
St. Tammany ..... page 22
St. Tammany ..... page 23
Lee Ostten, Livingston ..... page 24
Laura Croney, St. Tammany ..... page 25
Richard Laird, Tangipahoa ..... page 26

Table of Contents

Michelle Hartley, St. Tammany ..... page 27
Laurence Roques and Joe Badon, St. Tammany ..... page 28
Denver & Vera Nobles, Washington ..... page 29
Andrew Stokes, Lydia Bookter, Mary Morgan & Velma Bell,
Rose Pittman, Livingston ..... page 30
Jackie and Sam Catalanotto, St. Tammany ..... page 31
Kurt Wamsley, Washington ..... page 32
Pat McNeil, St. Helena ..... page 33
Dudley Smith, St. Tammany ..... page 34
Dale Kimball, Sylvia Crouch, Kristy Theil, Pat McQueen,
Patricia Fowler, Debbie Shimmeck, & Christine Bean,
Susan Burnell, John and Marie Williams, & Sherry Sinclair,
Susan Duval, Washington ..... page 35
Jonita Gibson, Washington ..... page 36
Kevin Borsarge, Tangipahoa ..... page 37
Sarah Kent, St. Helena ..... page 38
Taria Lewis and Tammy Dufrene, Livingston ..... page 39
Michael Cage, St. Helena ..... page 40
Tracy Robertson, St. Helena ..... page 41
Joe and Sharon Kelly, Washington ..... page 42
Charles Certain, St. Tammany ..... page 43
Jackie Badon, St. Helena ..... page 44

Louisiana's Unsung Heroes

August 29, 2005 is a day most people living in the state of Louisiana will never forget.

No one would have imagined the tragedy that was to unfold. In a matter of hours, lives would be changed forever; homes would be lost, communities fractured, family members separated from one another for months. First responders would be asked to perform tasks that no human should ever have to do. Lives would be lost as well; in fact, individuals would be lost and never found. This was the great disaster known as Hurricane Katrina.

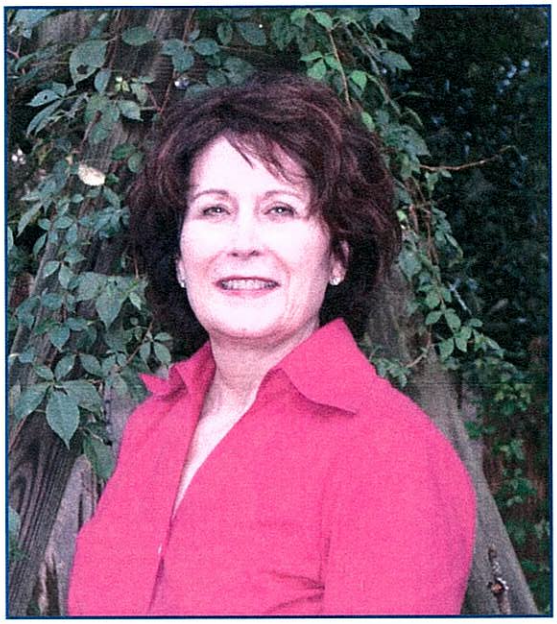
Yet in the face of tragedy we got to see ordinary citizens of this state come together and help one another like never before. These ordinary individuals didn't feel they were doing anything extraordinary, just what any human being would do to help his fellow man.

These are just some of the Unsung Heroes of Louisiana and they need to be recognized for their valiant and heroic acts. Most of these individuals also faced tragedies of their own but still came to the rescue of others and remained committed to the restoration of Louisiana. During the weeks, months and now years to follow Hurricane Katrina some are still on the front lines assisting those who remain confused and in limbo.

What these people show us, through their selfless and tireless action, through their faith and optimism in spite of the chaos, is that it is possible for human goodness to rise above the rubble.

This collection of stories honors those who gave the most, especially when they had so little to give. As you look at these faces, know that you are looking at the best kind of human: one who leads with the heart. May our gratitude also go out to those whose stories you will not read here; those heroes remain anonymous to all but those closest to them. It is impossible to know, or count , or honor all the goodness that was shown in this darkest of times. They are what the Louisiana Spirit is all about.

These Unsung Heroes are the story of resilience for the State of Louisiana.



Dianna Drake

Diana Drake, living in St. Tammany Parish for just seven short years she has become a roaming community ambassador. She is well connected to civic and faith based organizations and during the recovery efforts of Hurricane Katrina, Diana has helped in restoring the lives of the poor, homeless, hungry, drug addicted, and many others in need. No matter what time of day or night Dianna is the type of hero that you can call upon and within hours your problem is solved. We are all very blessed to have her as a co worker and she is an tremendous asset to our community. She has worked directly with the Courts, the DA's Office , the Probation and Parole Office, as well as the St. Tammany Parish Jail, providing help to men, women, and youth.

Dianna has been involved in various Prison Ministries over the past fifteen years. She was Director of the Northshore Glory House Ministry, which was the first faith-based program for anger management and substance approved by the courts in Baton Rouge. Dianna is a Board Certified Christian Counselor under the credentialed under the Therapon Institute. Therapon Institute is a continuing education provider for the National Association of Social Workers, LA Chapter, the Louisiana Counseling Association, and the Louisiana Office of Addictive Disorders

Co-founder of Legacy, Center for Excellence, Inc., a Therapeutic Outpatient Counseling and Educational Training Center. Legacy offers Recovery Support in anger management, assertiveness training, character development, conflict resolution for individuals being released from incarceration. Other curricula offered are assessment, post traumatic stress, life skills. job readiness, spiritual counseling, and marriage and family counseling.

Margaret Baham

Margaret Baham has been a worker at Tangipahoa Cares for several years now. She is the person who knows exactly how the program operates and what their grants are funded for. When the local Louisiana Spirit team needs information Margaret is one of the first people we contact. Also with being employed there for so long she has come to have one of the best understandings of the needs in our area. She has a very professional attitude about the work she does there at the agency. Margaret is a behind the scenes kind of person who the team felt needed to be recognized by this project.

When asked, Margaret will explain that she loves the work she does which is the only reason why she does what she does. After the hurricane with her office still out of power and unable to do anything there she went to where she was needed. She reported to the local shelters that had opened and started collecting needs assessments and trying to help with whatever she could. When the American Red Cross opened their disaster financial assistance offices, Margaret was instrumental in locating the spaces for them to open. Tangipahoa is blessed to have such a great woman working so hard to care for the place she loves and the people who live there.

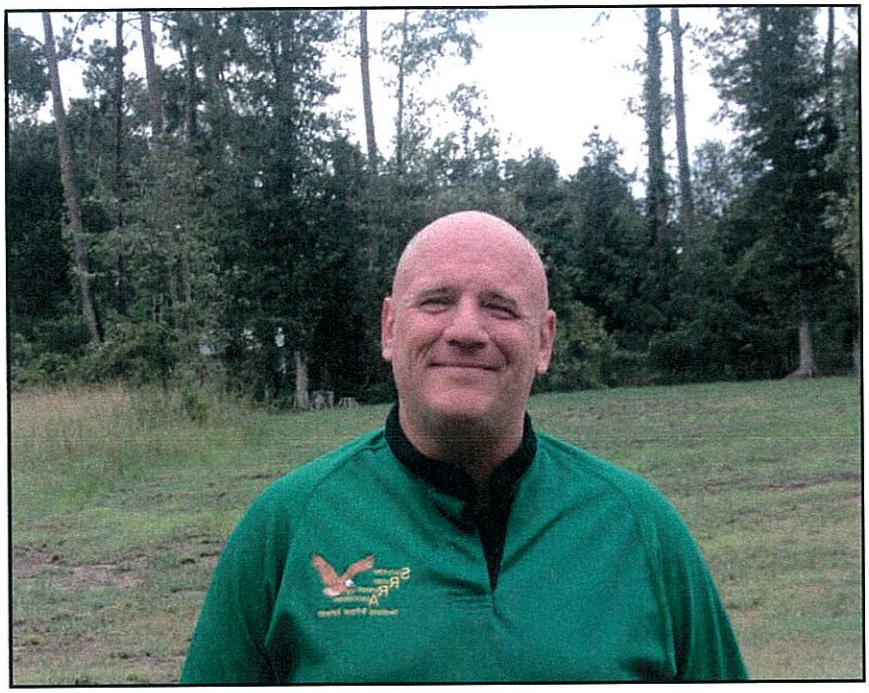
Karen and Charles Graves

Karen and Charles Graves are First Responders who are members of the St. Helena Disaster Assistance Team (DAT). They opened the Greensburg Community Center Shelter following Red Cross recommendations for shelter during Hurricane Katrina. After the recommended three days Karen and Charles packed up and locked up the shelter supplies. They were ready for Red Cross to pick them up. Within hours the sheriff's Office notified them that they had to re-open because people were streaming into Greensburg with no place to sleep. For the next several weeks Karen would create structure out of chaos while Charles helped in addition to assisting in the fire house and on emergency calls. Karen and her team found food, clothing, and living space for hundreds of people. They helped them find family and other lodgings. They made sure each individual got Red Cross and FEMA assistance, sometimes bus or plane tickets. Most people came to the shelter with only what they could carry. All had come under dire circumstance. Some had come with a chip on their shoulder. One individual came with AIDs another with an addiction to Methadone. They kept the peace and managed to find ways, with the generosity and help of local residents, to attend to the needs of every one who came to the shelter.

Nat Williams

For the weeks after the storm Nat Williams, who is acting Sheriff of Greensburg, worked with his team of deputies which were divided into three groups. Each group took a crew of inmates to help clear debris immediately after the storm. Armed with chainsaws, they helped by removing trees from residents homes and driveways. Sheriff Deputies brought generators to residents needing them to run Oxygen machines. Nat slept in a cot in the office while his deputies and staff worked 12 hour shifts to provide services 24 hours a day seven days a week. They provided security for the gas stations around the clock for the first two weeks after the storm. The lines to the gas pumps were long. Every one needed gas and it was scarce. There were frequently altercations in the lines for gas at the pumps. The Sheriffs Dept. provided the security for the gas stations in Amite and Greensburg. After several days the southern portion of the parish was getting lights. Transportation and distribution of the limited essential resources like ice and water was provided. The sheriffs Dept. invited Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials to set up shop in their office area. The dispatch and office teams were at FEMA's disposal to assist with citizens who were accessing Red Cross and Welfare funding. This he and his team did in addition to responding to the intensively increased emergency calls from citizens.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."



Stephen Parrill

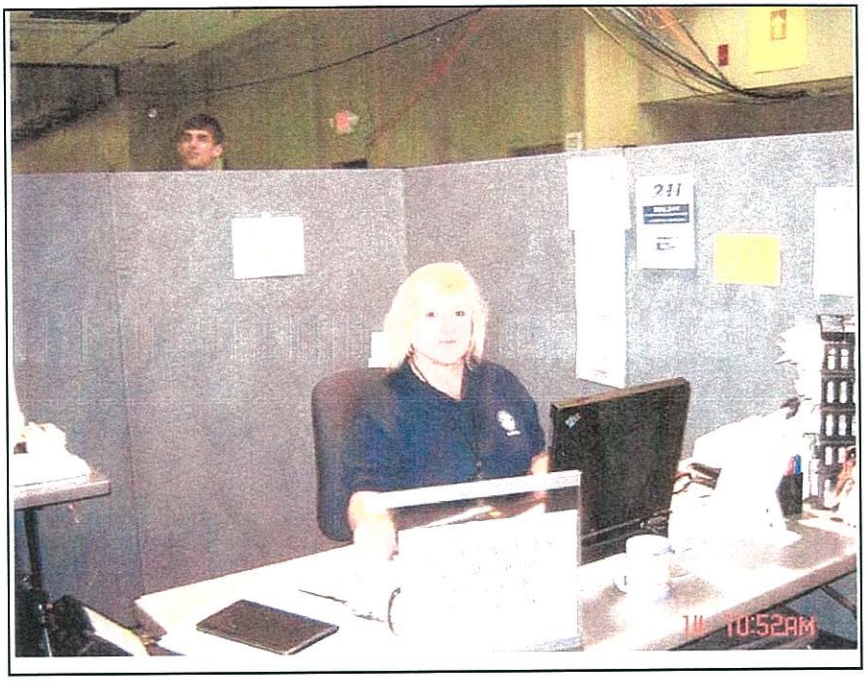
Supervisor of Instruction
Livingston Parish Public Schools

During Katrina Mr. Parrill took the initiative to obtain approval to utilize the food items in his school to delivery to evacuees residing in a shelter in Jellystone National Park in Robert La. He utilized his time and transportation to make these deliveries. In addition to providing food, Stephen furthered his human concerns by becoming a role model of love by helping the young people in the Springfield Park. He visited trailers of students, who had missed the school bus, and talked with parents about their children educational needs. He assisted students in need of eyeglasses for the upcoming school year. He continues to be a support and mentor to those in the Springfield School area where he works. His unselfish commitment to the community has provided a positive role model in this area.

Mr. Michael E. Brown

Mr. Brown lives in the Tammany Transitional Living Community (TLC) in Slidell. He finds used bicycles, either by donation or purchase, and repairs them. Once they are in working order, he instructs the children in the TLC how to ride responsibly and then gives the bikes to the children. After they ride, the children are instructed to return the bikes and lock them. He estimates that twenty children have received bicycles so far. The children have developed friendships with each other while riding. This act of kindness has given the residents of the TLC the opportunity to become more of a community.

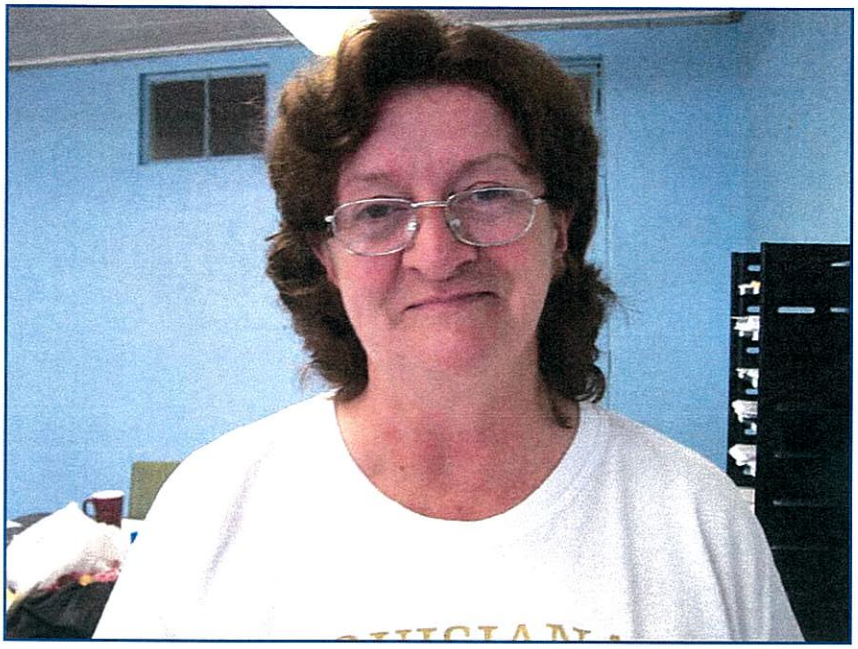
Originally from Auburn, Alabama, Mr. Brown is a disabled veteran who served in the Army. After Hurricane Katrina he felt compelled to use his search and rescue skills to help the people of New Orleans and Slidell. He currently works in construction and is helping people rebuild their houses.



Debbie Meyers

Three days after the Hurricane Katrina Debbie went with her daughter Marlaina to Washington Parish to bring water, food, and other supplies to her in-laws that live in the rural areas. When they arrived they was so confused all they could say is…" this is America, this shouldn't be happening here". Debbie and her daughter gave out water and food to people in lines for gas. As others were looking for sites to set up shelters, they tried to set up a distribution site in the rural areas because people couldn't get to Bogalusa to get supplies.

Debbie then went to Baton Rouge and that is where her mission started. She volunteered three and half weeks working 14 to 16 hours a day. The needs for the victims were so overwhelming that she had to make herself go home at night and returned every morning at 6:00 am. She drove back and forth from Ponchatoula to Baton Rouge every day.

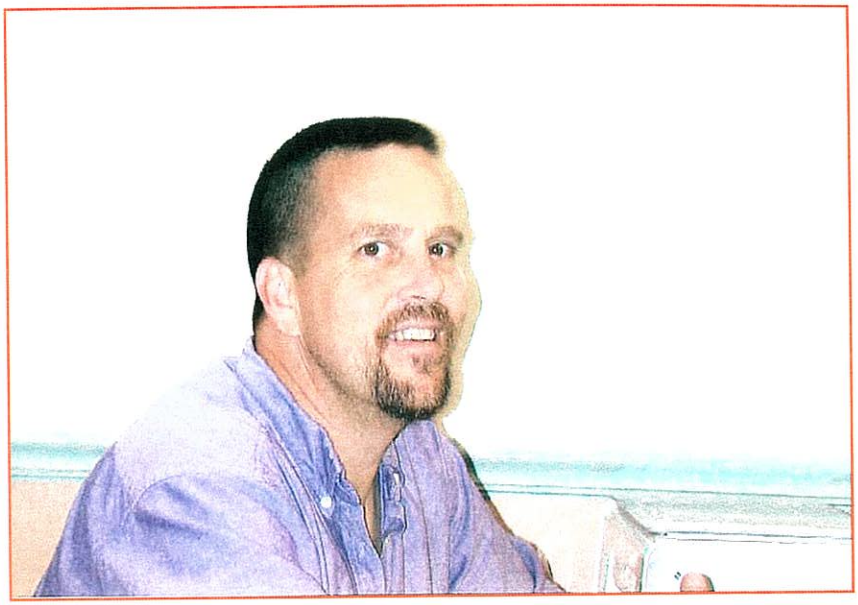


Brinda Normand

Brinda Normand left and later returned home to Bogalusa to discover there were animals left after the storm that needed to be cared for. Brinda fed pets throughout the neighborhood that had been abandoned by their owners. She packed water from the church in gallon drums and put food in her vehicle to give to them. She cooked over an open fire for herself and neighbors using the food from her freezer.

Many were terrified in her neighborhood that Bogalusa would never be the same and wanted to sell and move. She could feel the panic in the air but she assured people that circumstances were only going to last for a short time and they could get through it using just a little ingenuity in their situation. She sent her daughter to Arizona to be with family and stayed and worked with her church to give people shelter and food. She was glad to be able to help in the time of need, it was the least she could do.

WASHINGTON PARISH



Thomas Descent

Thomas Descent is described by his peers as a smiling, friendly, funny, and dedicated man who spends his time volunteering and working behind the scenes. Tom serves at Trinity Baptist Church in Franklinton Louisiana as Pastor of Administrations and is on the Disaster Recovery Team. Both of these positions are without pay and Tom does them with great joy and passion. Tom is a teacher, leader, and friend to several individuals scattered throughout Franklinton. You will see Tom greeting just about everyone in the town of Franklinton with a smile and a kind word. Tom takes great pride in his community and reaches out to help all in need. His sacrifice for those around him demonstrate his heart and faith from which we all say, "Thanks Tom".

Lynda Deniger

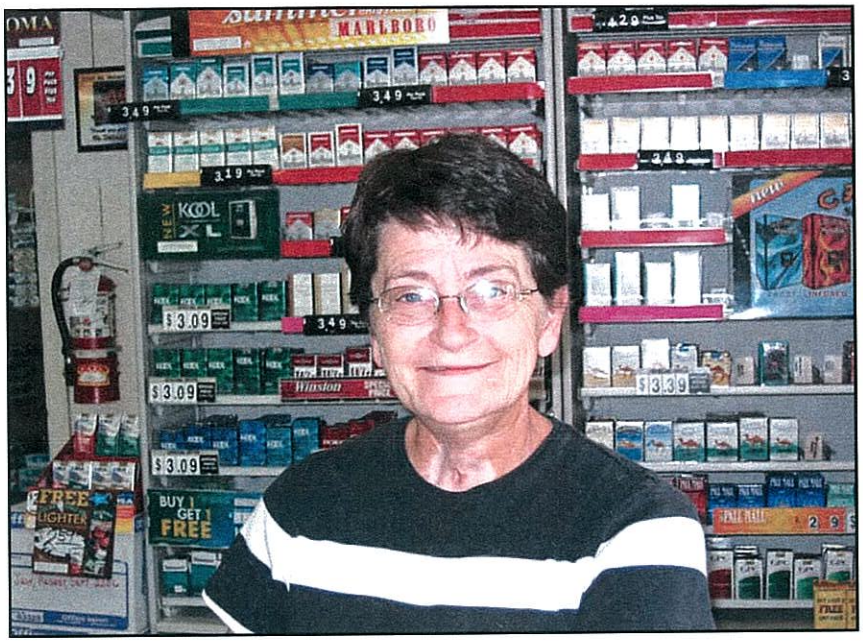
It started with a phone call from Dianna Drake. She had a young woman recently released from St. Tammany Parish Jail who had nowhere to live, no clothes and no money. Having worked with the incarcerated for the past ten years, I knew it to be an all-too-common occurrence. I also knew that without some type of assistance, this young woman would probably do something to put herself right back in jail within a short period of time.

Crystal had moved here with her boyfriend. They had been arrested for drug possession. After she began attending Cocaine Anonymous in jail, she knew she wanted to start her life over with Jesus Christ. She was also interested in reconciling with her common-law husband with whom she had had 5 children. Israel drove to Louisiana from Florida with one thought in mind—marry the mother of his children and take her back to Florida where their children were anxious to see the mother they hadn't seen in six years.

The first thing Crystal had to do was apply for a probation transfer to Florida. The second was to marry the man who was on his knee proposing. Since I was an ordained minister, I offered to marry them. I wanted this occasion to be special, an unforgettable event, as every bride hopes it to be. With little notice I borrowed a wedding dress and quickly planned a wedding and reception, with decorations, refreshments and a wedding cake.

It was the first wedding I had ever performed, but it was still legal. Wanting to add an extra-special touch to the happy occasion, my husband and I sprang for a hotel room in nearby Hammond for their honeymoon.

Crystal and Israel worked menial jobs at my church and stayed there temporarily until Crystal's probation transfer came through about 6 weeks later.



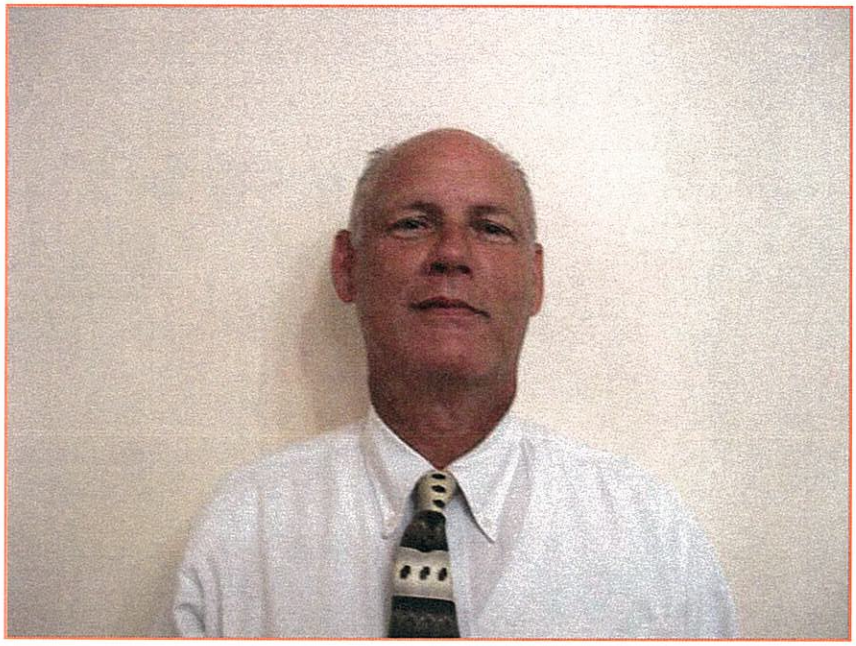
Martha Raiford

Martha Raiford owns the St. Helena "Stop and Go" convenience store.

She is committed to bettering the quality of life of area residents, particularly those of the children. Martha believes in philanthropy. Her store sponsors "The Forest Festival" has donated $5,700.00 to the St. Helena Public School Board for purchase of School uniforms, Band uniforms and school supplies. She advocates community cooperation for economic development.

On August 29th, the day after Katrina devastated the area, Martha opened the "St. Helena Stop and Go". She and one other employee kept the store open from early morning till late evening. She also kept the gas pumps open when she had fuel to pump. Martha slept in the store and opened it and closed it each day. During this time her mother was home bound. Martha checked in on her and continued to keep the store accessible to local residents and evacuees. She donated ice to the Quad Area Agency for patients with diabetes, emphysema and asthma. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina Martha has helped collect, store and distribute clothes to local residents and evacuees who were affected by Katrina.

Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans Louisiana Spirit St. Helena team members have frequently spoken with Martha at St. Helena Parish Coalition and Unmet Needs Committee meetings. She offered her support during Louisiana Spirit St. Helena team members' initiative to support the local Holiday Toy Drive. So many local families have had their lives terribly disrupted by the Storm. It was very important to Martha that the children in the area not have their Christmas devastated by Hurricane Katrina. She is committed to doing whatever she can to assist the residents of her community.



Bill Ritchie

A lot of people don't quite realize what a funeral pallor does in the wake of a disaster. Bill Ritchie owner of Poole-Ritchie Funeral Home knows first hand how it operates. There was an estimated fourteen to sixteen deaths just 9 days after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast Region bringing turmoil and even worse, death. That number of deaths was unheard of in a little city like Bogalusa. They had no generators so they had to quickly embalm the deceased by an early 1900 hundred method called "Gravity Embalming". They had a hard time reaching families with no phones.

Families came into the funeral home searching for their loved ones not knowing if they were there or had been rescued to shelters. In many cases he went to families homes to do funeral arrangements as many people had no transportation because of shortage of gas. Most of the deaths were elderly people due to stress of the hurricane and they died of natural causes. The funeral home had to have grave side services due to no electricity and only one hour viewings of the body. The bodies were put in front of an open window to get the outside light for the families to view. There were two to three funerals a day within a month's period. The chapels were shut down for seven months after the storm .

Louisiana's Unsung Heroes

ST. TAMMANY PARISH

Susan Burnell, John and Marie Williams, & Sherry Sinclair

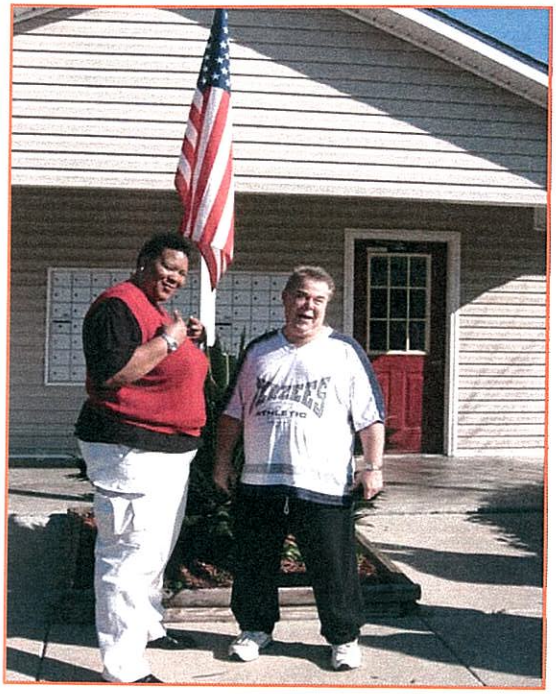
ALDERSGATE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Under the leadership of Marie and John Williams, Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Slidell has had a profound effect on the recovery of the north shore area. In addition to their regular ministry, Northshore Disaster Recovery, Inc. (NDRI), and UM-COR are located on Aldersgate's campus.

Recognizing a need for an unmet needs committee to help in the recovery of St. Tammany Parish, an organizational meeting was held in November 2005 and Northshore Disaster Recovery was the result. Aldersgate has housed thousands of volunteers from all over the U.S. and many foreign countries, volunteers who have come to help our community rebuild.

With most meeting areas in Slidell destroyed or heavily damaged by Katrina, Aldersgate U.M.C. has made their facilities available to many service organizations. They have provided a meeting room for the LA Spirit East St. Tammany team since April 2006, as well as meeting space for other trainings and the federal site visit in January 2007. Marie says, "We're all in this together."

"There is a tremendous strength that is growing in the world through sharing together, praying together, suffering together, and working together."



Tinekea Heard

Ms Heard in her quiet but stern manner has proved to be an individual with compassion for others. She was the manager at the Spring Tree Apartment; there she has exhibited an interest in the children who reside there. She has had activities for them which she supported from her personal funds, and has come to their defense when they found themselves in situations beyond their control. She has provided residence in her complex with a safe haven after trying times. She has several evacuees living in the building and she was as listening for agencies that would lend support to them just to get back on their feet.

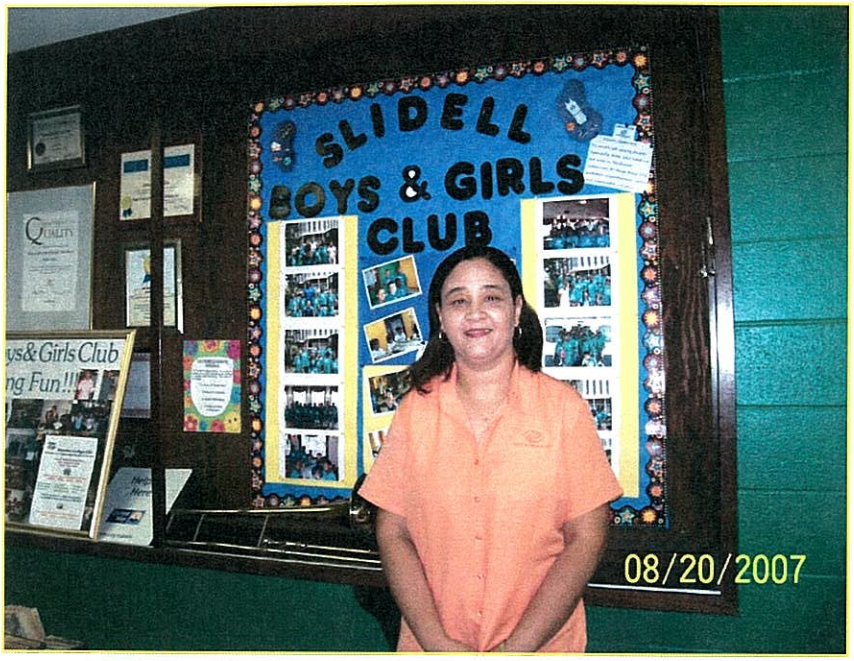
Ms. Heard was a special friend to LA Spirit Livingston Parish team. She opened her doors and provided the team a safe space to meet. Initially, the agreement was for a few hours in the morning, but as time went on we've come to appreciate this space as our base of operations. Ms. Heard provided the team with a copier, coffee pot, and other basic supplies. She was always available to help in any capacity from lifting and arranging chairs; to that listening ear who provided us with support to continue our mission.

WASHINGTON PARISH

Kathy & George Martin

Two days every month Kathy and George Martin lead a varied group of volunteers in the sweltering, summer heat to pass out boxes of food to those in need in Washington Parish. The volunteers and the Martins are feeling hot and tired but also an enormous satisfaction at the numbers of people who now have food in their homes. The job at the food bank starts again immediately after the actual distribution and continues with registering new applicants, calling the regulars, and making sure that those in crisis have one less worry.

Kathy and George hail from Latrobe, Penn. and have three grown children , which includes a daughter currently stationed in Iraq. They have been traveling around the country since 1999 and belong to a group of volunteers called Campers on Mission(COM). They have assisted the victims of several hurricanes in Florida, Texas, and Louisiana. They reported feeling that their journey of assistance is guided by God and that they receive much more from the victims than they could possibly give. Those on this particular stop on their journey are most grateful to this couple and to the Trinity Baptist Church of Franklinton and the Washington Parish Sheriff's Office for a helping hand and loving hearts.



Marla Meadors

The Boys and Girls Club was heavily damaged during Hurricane Katrina. Understanding the need to get the club restored so the children in the area could have a safe place in which to play, Marla didn't wait to start the clean up and restoration of the center. She immediately began looking for ways to get the center running again. She spearheaded the Kaboom playground build, partnering with Disney and ESPN to build a beautiful new playground for the center.

Marla goes above and beyond her duties. She has organized affordable summer camps and solicits sponsors for those who cannot afford it. She provides free aftercare for children in the community, she organizes a free flag football program for children who cannot play in the regular city league and she worked tirelessly to get the Slidell club qualified as one of the sites for the nationally known Smart Girls Program. But, she also provides understanding, love and guidance to children in the community and is a constant support for the residents of the area.

Louisiana's Unsung Heroes

ST. TAMMANY PARISH

Jody Herrington, John Gillespie, Victor Zagorski, Chris Wages, Buford Rose, Ryan Meadows, Felicia Kelleher, Hailey Lotz, Joseph Boyle, Christopher A. William, Daniel P. Moore, Brennie Monette, Sam Constantine, and Melissa Berry

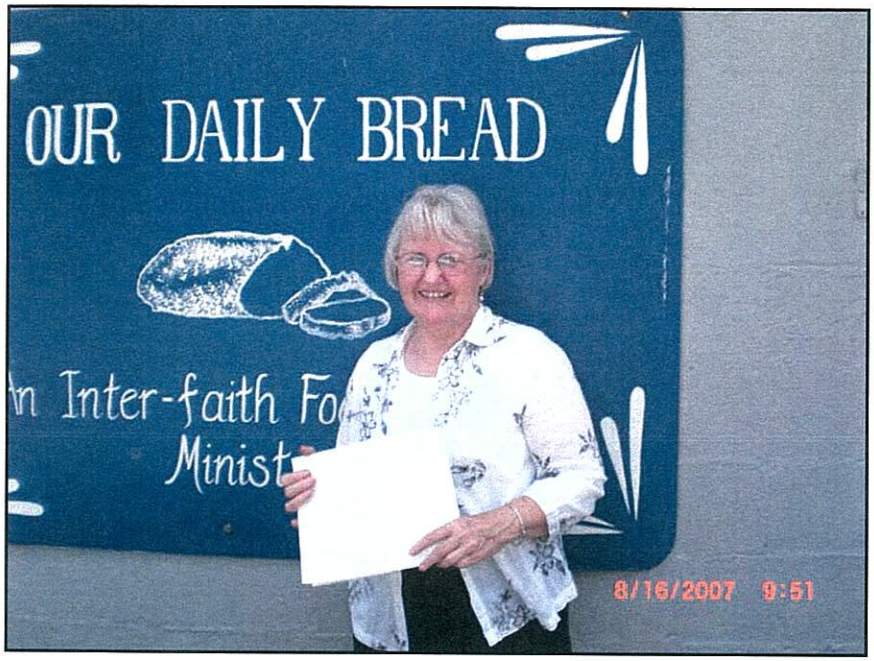
Operation Blessing International provides strategic disaster relief, medical aid, hunger relief, clean water and community development in 22 countries around the world on a daily basis.

They were on the ground in Jackson, Miss., staging supplies for the Gulf Coast area days before Katrina. The day after Katrina hit, floodwaters had not receded in New Orleans, and several of their trucks were turned around. In Slidell, Operation Blessing met Mayor Ben Morris who found a place for them to set up their relief operations. A mobile kitchen was set up on Front Street where Operation Blessing volunteers began cooking and serving 6800 meals a day – breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The immediate need was for food, water and ice. Next, blue tarps were provided to cover damaged roofs. Gutting of homes continues on both the north and south shores, as well as rebuilding.

There are 32 on staff, including the medical team which operates a free medical and dental clinic in New Orleans East, and all stay at the site Mayor Morris found for them two years ago. The medical staff has seen 30,000 patients to date and issued 74,000 prescriptions. 12.2 million pounds of supplies have been brought in to our area by Operation Blessing.

In the New Orleans area, Operation Blessing has provided nearly $60 million in cash grants, relief supplies and over 265,000 hours of volunteer service to date, and continues to mobilize an army of volunteers to provide relief through a number of recovery programs.

We are truly "blessed" to have Operation Blessing here in Louisiana helping in our recovery.



Myrna Jordan

Our Daily Bread is the main food bank for the parish of Tangipahoa. The director, Myrna Jordan is responsible for operating 16 different food banks in the parish. Each month emergency food boxes are handed out to the residents of the Transitional Living Communities since most have no transportation or no way to get food. Besides the work that she does for the TLC's the sixteen food banks hand out hundreds of food boxes each month to its regular cliental that qualify for services. Twice a week a food kitchen is opened that serves hot meals to anyone that comes in.

Throughout our program when ever she meets someone that could possible benefit from our services, Myrna is the first to call. The team has even watched her take money out her own pocket to help someone when they really needed it. People like Myrna Jordan are very rare in this world, which is why the southern Tangipahoa team wants to recognize her for all the wonderful work that she continues to do. If there was more people in the world like Myrna then the world would not have as many problems as it does.

TANGIPAHOA PARISH

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Louisiana's Unsung Heroes

ST. TAMMANY PARISH

Dale Kimball, Sylvia Crouch, Kristy Thiel, Pat McQueen, Patricia Fowler, Debbie Schimmeck and Christine Bean

Northshore Disaster Recovery, Inc. (NDRI), located on the campus of Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Slidell, was established in October 2005, following Hurricane Katrina, as the Long Term Recovery Organization for St. Tammany Parish. Their purpose is to respond to those who were uninsured or underinsured and whose unmet needs will not be covered by other relief systems, private or public.

Comprised of eighty-five organizations, NDRI has had a profound effect on the recovery of St. Tammany and Washington Parish. Over 8,000 people have been served in some way. By the end of October 2007, NDRI will have completed their 400th totally rebuilt home. To date, 875 major repairs have been completed by over 20,000 volunteers from 48 states and 20 foreign countries, and represent 950,000 man-hours of work. As the volunteers arrive to help rebuild our community, their state or country flag is flown over the NDRI office. At times, over 20 flags are flying at one time.

We are fortunate to have NDRI, their staff, and the volunteers they continue to bring in to help rebuild the north shore.

Andrew Stokes, Lydia Brookter, Mary Morgan, and Velma Bell

For the past 23 years, Mt. Olive AME Church in Slidell has sponsored a food ministry, providing hot meals to the elderly, shut-ins, and families of the community. In the beginning, Mt. Olive Food Ministries provided meals one day per week, then two, three, four and now six days a week.

Hurricane Katrina's storm surge caused extensive damage to the building and destroyed all supplies. Volunteers worked tirelessly to make repairs in order to reopen. After seven months, on March 11, 2006, services were resumed. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the ministry was serving 225 meals a day. Today, they serve 300 meals a day. Volunteers help with the cooking, and volunteer drivers deliver the meals to the elderly and infirm. Meals are also served on site to those that are able to get to the center.

Thanks to a Rotary grant and many volunteer workers, a new building for Mt. Olive Food Ministries was dedicated on Sept. 13, 2007.

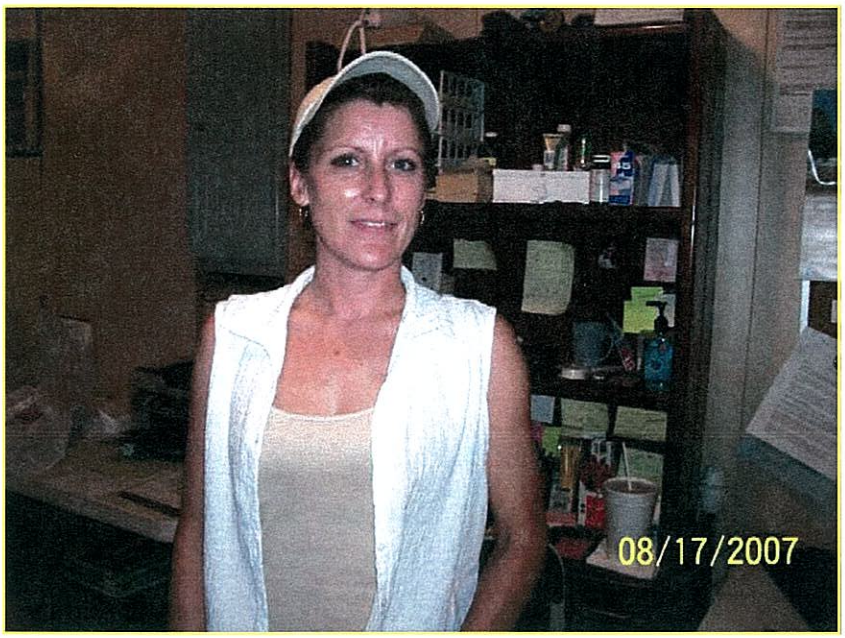
LIVINGSTON PARISH

Lee Ostten

Lee is a resident of Denham Springs. During the storm he answered the call to help out to those affected by hurricane Katrina. Lee saw and heard the news and saw the suffering of so many. He had to do something, and he did. Lee obtained water and food and started delivering to the evacuees not only in Livingston Parish but throughout the state. He even delivered to the Mississippi area. He utilized his own money, gas and transportation to achieve this task. Went he saw the need growing; he felt he had to do more. Lee through his negotiation, and his won't take no for an answer attitude was able to obtain several 18 wheelers filled with water from Arkansas to assist the people. He has not stopped he provides spiritual counseling and guidance to the people of Livingston and those who have decided to settle here. He and his wife have opened their doors and hearts to those less fortunate. He truly lives the song "If I Can Help Somebody as I Pass Along Then My Living Shall Not Be In Vain"

Lee continues his supportive efforts with the fire and police personnel in the parish. He is always available for a supportive word, pray, or conversation, just to keep them going.

"In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love."



Laura Croney

Laura Croney is the compassionate manager of Tammany Mobile Home Park in Slidell, where approximately 1200 residents live in 432 FEMA trailers. She not only manages the park, working hand in hand with FEMA, but also advocates for her tenants whenever the need arises.

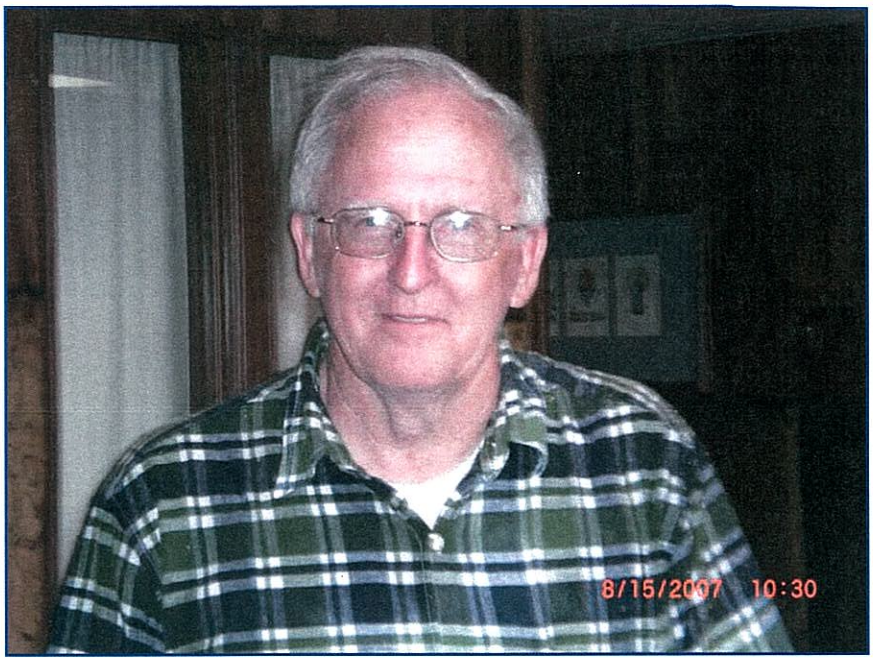
Laura says that the biggest job she has is seeing that the tenants' needs are met. She goes above and beyond to make that happen. Typically seen talking with residents and working after hours, Laura devotes time and energy to helping the mobile home park become a true community.

Laura works closely with LA Spirit's East St. Tammany team in providing services to the residents. She feels that by helping others, she is helping herself.

"Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed."

ST. TAMMANY PARISH

TANGIPAHOA PARISH



Richard Laird

Richard Laird is an upstanding member of the local community. Mr. Laird owns a large building/warehouse in downtown Hammond. Directly after the storm only a few of his office spaces were being occupied. When he learned of the Louisiana Spirit Crisis Counseling Program he decided to offer free office space to the teams in Tangipahoa parish. During the first phase of the recovery program the Tangipahoa team did not have an office space which made it difficult to perform our regular duties. With the donation of the office space it has allowed the team to have space for counseling sessions, meetings, and a place to keep our important paperwork. The southern Tangipahoa team has been using the free office space for an entire year now and when he learned that the northern team did not have a place to meet he went ahead and cleaned out another office in the same building for the northern team. In addition, Mr. Laird has offered us additional space at no charge if we were to ever need the extra space.

On top of the generous donation from Mr. Laird, he has always been there to answer any questions about the parish since he is a long time resident of the parish. The Tangipahoa team is truly blessed to have come across such a generous man like Richard Laird.

Michelle Hartley

Mrs. Hartley is the mother of three daughters and the wife of Keith Hartley, who is serving in the Army overseas. Their family home was flooded during Hurricane Katrina and she and her children lived with relatives for a while. Although they lost everything, this did not stop Michelle from volunteering to help other homeless families in shelters.

She is a long time employee of Wal-Mart and was instrumental in helping other Wal-Mart employees obtain grants and stay informed of services in the community. She has helped school children obtain school uniforms. She has also secured donations of arts and crafts supplies for child survivors of Katrina. These have been donated to Boys and Girls Club, Slidell and Volunteers of America Greater New Orleans Louisiana Spirit Program for use with children. As a devoted military spouse, she shops every Saturday for supplies to send to her husband and other service members who do not receive care packages. Mrs. Hartley has spent countless numbers of hours volunteering her service to those in need.

ST. TAMMANY PARISH

Laurence Roques and Joe Badon

Joy Fellowship in Slidell was providing relief and recovery assistance just days following Hurricane Katrina, even though the church building itself had been damaged. A satellite photograph taken on September 3, 2005, shows cars lined up for food, water, and other needed supplies. They were open seven days a week and soon started serving hot meals daily in their drive-through line, feeding 150-175 families per day.

Supplies and volunteers came in from all over the country to assist in the recovery and relief effort at Joy, which also included gutting and repairing homes. One volunteer serving meals was a U.S. Senator from Ohio who had come anonymously to assist with the recovery of our area.

Today, Joy Fellowship still provides assistance one day a week with hot meals and food to 100 families in their Slidell ministry, and one day a week in the 9th Ward in New Orleans where they serve 85 families.

"Do not wait for leaders. Do it alone, person to person."

Denver & Vera Nobles

Denver and Vera Nobles have been life long residents of rural Washington Parish. They experienced Hurricane Katrina on the couch in their cement block home. The storm peeled off their roof and downed many of the trees on their property. They lost a lifetime of treasures and belongings. Mrs. Nobles was injured shortly after the storm when she fell and broke her arm. Prior to the Hurricane, this elderly couple were very active in their church and community but were now broken hearted and paralyzed by the fear that comes from not knowing how they would provide for their day-to-day post Katrina needs as well as their future. Louisiana Spirit provided crisis counseling services and referrals to community resources.

The Nobles were able find help in repairing their home from Triangle of Hope Ministries. The repairs were months in the making but in the process of such, the Nobles now hopeful and less fearful began to participate in planning gatherings for the many groups of volunteers that traveled to Washington Parish to do recovery work as part of Triangle of Hope Ministries. The Nobles would host these groups at their damaged home site. They provided entertainment as they sang blue grass gospel while Mrs. Nobles played her washtub base string instrument and Mr. Nobles played the guitar and harmonica.

Rose Pittman

Community Activist

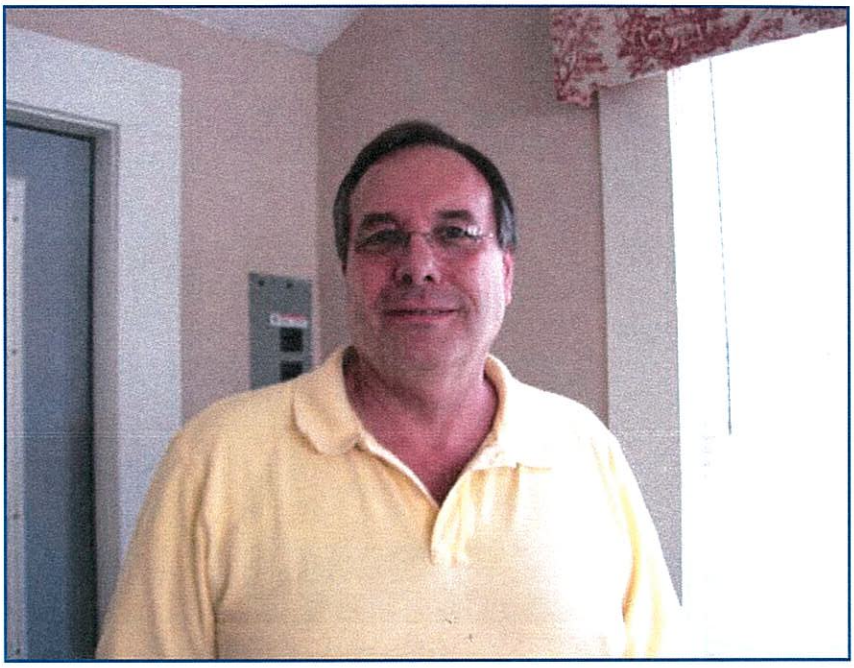
Ms. Pittman saw a need and stepped up to answer it. During the storm she worked with her church to secure donations for the evacuees in the Walker area. Ms. Pittman has since the hurricane provided spiritual guidance and support to the families in her area. With her love for children and concern for them having a well ground root in the church, she elicited support from her family and friends and La. Spirit staff to provide a camp for the children during the summer. This was a vision she had with no financial backing. She wanted to provide a safety place for the children to come, insure they had a meal, and provide some spirituality in their lives. She established Club Outreach and reached out. She was able to achieve her goal and had great satisfaction and success. She provided the children with a daily mid day meal, counseling, and supportive services, structured recreation, and mentors. She extended this to the parents and was able with the support of LA Spirit provide counseling, and supportive services to them.

Jackie and Sam Catalanotto

Jackie and Sam Catalanotto ARE the Food Bank. They seem to be everywhere at once in the 6,000 square-foot warehouse which holds food--and more. Lively volunteers, surrounded by palettes of canned goods stacked ceiling high, are doing everything – running the fork lift, packing canned goods and perishables into boxes and loading boxes into cars lined up and waiting for help.

The Food Bank of Covington was started by St. Peter St. Vincent de Paul Society in 1984 and has grown into the largest 501c-3 in the three-parish area, serving St. Tammany, Washington and Tangipahoa Parishes. Before Hurricane Katrina, they were helping 20-30 families. Immediately after the storm when Second Harvest's in New Orleans were damaged, the Covington Food Bank stepped up to help 100-120 families per day. It has quieted down to serving 60-80 families in their food program. In addition to helping families with food they have also assisted with financial support for medical and housing needs.

They are expanding to other services: a free dental clinic has opened and a free medical clinic is due to open in a few months. The Food Bank and dental clinic resides quietly at 820 N. Columbia. It does not receive federal, state, and city funding. They rely on donations, fundraisers, grants, and their most valuable resource, their all-volunteer staff.



Kurt Wamsley

Kurt Wamsley, owner of the Golden Pear restaurant Bogalusa has a hearty appetite to help people. He proved it on Aug. 29th, 2005 by bringing food from his restaurant to 1st Baptist church of Bogalusa to feed the American Red Cross as well as the Baptist relief workers who came to help heal spirits in the community. He took care of the volunteers while they were taking care of others. Kurt and his family spent three hard weeks over the stove cooking and taking care of individuals in the community.

Louisiana's Unsung Heroes

Pat McNeil

Despite her several surgeries, diminished sight and personal family heartbreaks, Pat's dedication to area residents has provided many of our clients with what they needed.

She and her husband brought their ministry and family to Greensburg/ St Helena Parish nearly 23 years ago. Since then they have worked with churches and organization to address the needs of local families and individuals. She and her husband provided food, clothing, encouragement, personal hygiene items, and often shelter and housing for residents in need and (more recently) relocated individuals and families. Her ministry named "New Beginnings" ministers not only to those in need in St. Helena Parish of Louisiana, but also to those seeking out an existence in the "Dump Colony" outside of Mexico City and the Americans living on the Navajo Reservations of New Mexico. They formally incorporated the ministry as a non profit organization in 1991. In addition to feeding, clothing, and sheltering evacuees since Katrina, to address the increased need after Katrina Pat joined the St. Helena Parish Coalition. She also helped form (and Chairs) the Unmet Needs Committee associated with the Coalition.

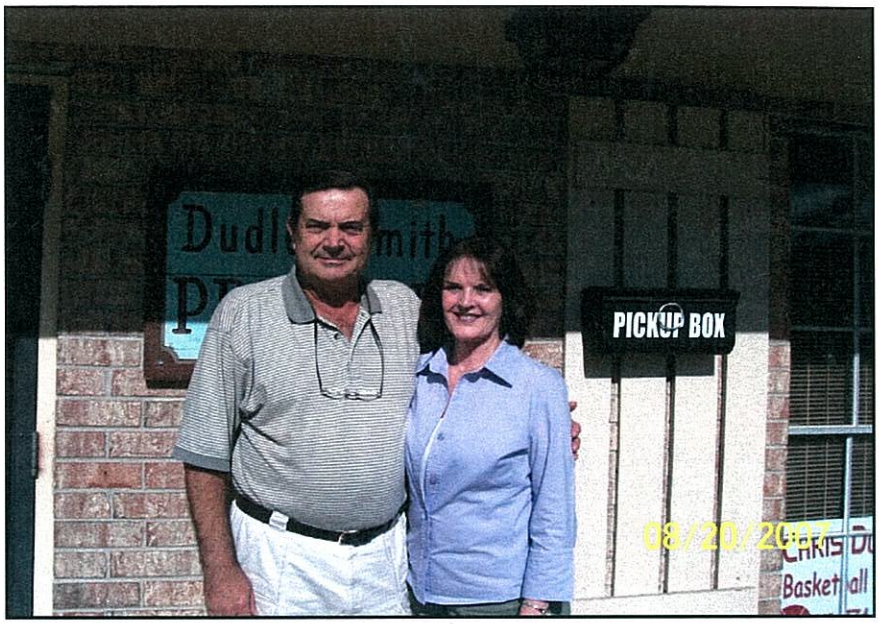
The "New Beginnings Ministry" under her stewardship has successfully acquired modular building facility and used it to house their food pantry which was previously housed in their home for several years. Recently they have joined with an organization named "World Vision" which allows them access to donated clothing, building materials, appliances, clothing and other household items at a negligible cost.

Pat recently received a grant from North Shore Community Foundation which allows "New Beginnings Ministry" to pay for ramps, electrical and septic system projects needed by area residents, many of whom were referred to her by LA Spirit St. Helena Parish team members. St. Helena Parish team of Louisiana Spirit is glad to know this generous, devoted woman and proud to call her "friend".

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink…"

Louisiana's Unsung Heroes

ST. TAMMANY PARISH



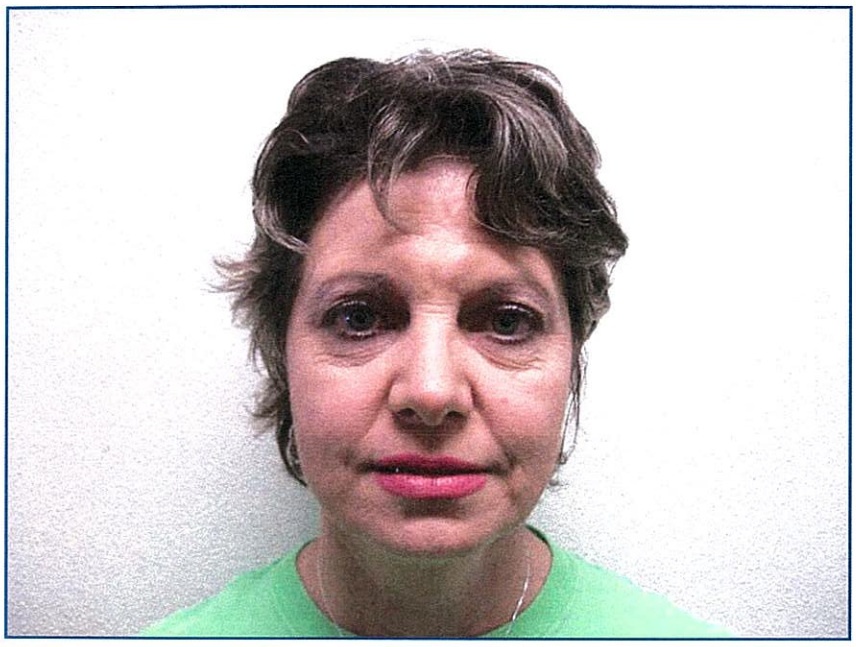
Dudley Smith

Slidell native Dudley Smith is a respected community leader and businessman who experienced personal losses from Hurricane Katrina's storm surge and winds. After checking on his home and business, Dudley's next stop was the Caring Center, a women's and children's shelter that he founded 13 years ago. Five huge trees had fallen on the roof, torrential rain had flooded the building, and a storage shed on the property was completely destroyed. A number of women and children were sheltered there during the hurricane and were still there as they has no other place to go. Dudley found help at Grace Memorial Baptist Church, who sent a crew of volunteers to the shelter with ladders and chainsaws. They cut the trees from the roof, stacked the wood, and then repaired the roof.

Dudley dedicated his efforts to repairing this valuable community resource. He attributes the success of this project to assistance from local Rotarians Bob Perkins, Don O'Brien and Jay Rose, as well as Savoie Construction. Several Rotary grants financed the project.

The Caring Center is open again, providing a home and care for women and children in need.

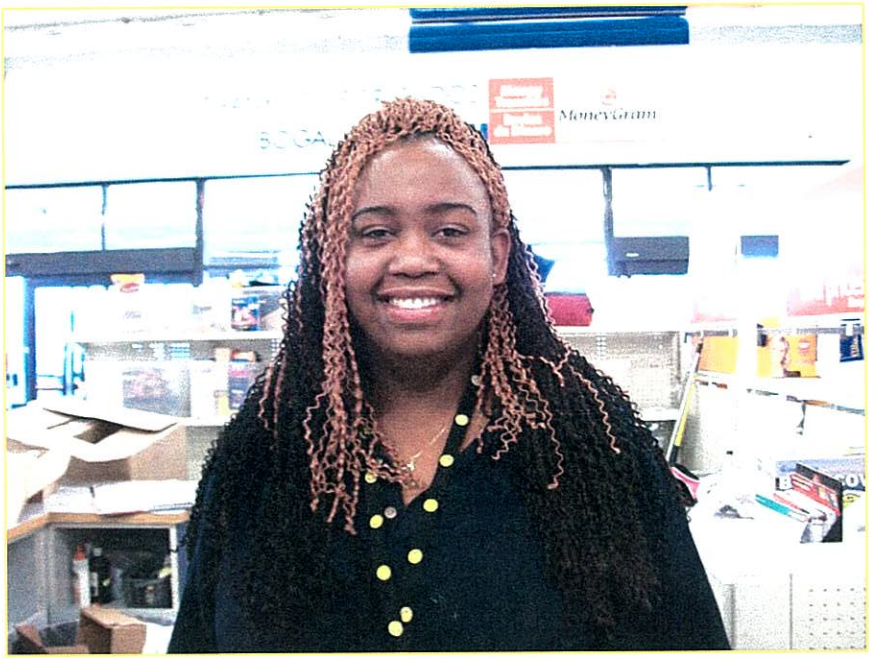
"...it is more blessed to give than to receive."



Susan Duval

Directly after Katrina she reopened the restaurant "Duval's" on Louisiana Avenue on Highway 10. She and her staff slept in the restaurant. They freely fed food to all first responders (Police, National Guard, Firemen etc.), anyone in the area who was hungry. She and her husband networked with several local businesses that did not have electricity. Duval was the only restaurant that had a large generator that could help provide refrigeration needed. Susan and her family had the compassion to go above and beyond helping others.

WASHINGTON PARISH



Jonita Gibson

Jonita Gibson looks like your average person; a Wal-Mart employee for nine years. August 29th, 2005 was a traumatic day for Jonita as it was to many others. Her mother lived in the Presidential Quarters (Terrace) while she and her sister were living on Ann Street. After the hurricane passed, trees blocking the road, power lines were down, and the creek seemed to swell with rage. She was unable to get to her mother with the bridge flooded from rising water, debris and trees still falling down everywhere. She and her sister, Zena, waded in waist deep water, climbed over and under trees, jumped over power lines to get to their mother's house. When they saw that she was okay and her house was not flooded they went back through the water and debris and waited for the water to recede. They used her truck slowly creeping throughout the neighborhood trying to help everyone. No one had electricity. Jonita and her sister would rally the neighbors together for prayer. Finally they were able to bring their mother back to their house safely. She served and housed many people in their home.

Kevin Bosarge

Kevin has been a member of the Tangipahoa Unmet Needs Committee since it was first founded after Hurricane Katrina. He volunteered to be the treasurer of the committee which was a very time consuming position. Besides being in charge of his church and the treasurer of the Unmet Needs Committee, he also operates a food bank through his church. Over the summer he donated his church to the Unmet Needs Summer Camp for the children of the Transitional Living Communities because they could not find a place that would be suitable for the camp. Through countless volunteer hours and other work that can go unnoticed, Kevin is making a positive change in the local community.

"...I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

LOUISIANA Spirit
HURRICANE RECOVERY

Sarah Kent

Since Hurricane Katrina Sarah Kent, a Licensed Clinical Social worker, has endeavored to educate community leaders concerning recognizing and communicating consequences of, and symptoms associated with, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

She is committed to promoting the highest quality of life for area youth and the elderly. She has made it a priority to be informed concerning developments in her field and publicize the message that there is a serious need for mental health resources in St. Helena Parish. She serves on the St. Helena Florida Parish Human Service Coalition as parliamentarian, where she encourages members to address possible ways to "get the word out" that the residents of St. Helena Parish are insufficiently served in the field of mental health. The local resources were inadequate before Katrina and the need for mental health resources has increased dramatically. She frequently speaks upon the need for accessible mental health resources for area residents and more recently a need for Trauma Resolution. Sarah has familiarized herself with some of the local impact of the 1927 Flood through oral history and some research and reading. She recognizes very similar results. Many people were in despair and functioning lower than prior capability. Her research also illuminated an intense, prolonged increase in violence after the 1927 Flood. Sarah is adamant about the need to educate and inform area residents about ordinary, normal responses to the traumatic conditions. Sarah Kent has tirelessly written letters to Doctors, Counselors and Clinicians seeking assistance for her community. She has spoken up in Coalition meetings and the Counsel on Aging Meetings to let people know that St Helena Parish residents are inadequately served.

Sarah has said "What I know about social work is: a healthy individual in a nurturing environment thrives. In social work we either work to improve the environment, work to improve the emotional & physical health of the individual, or any combination of the three".

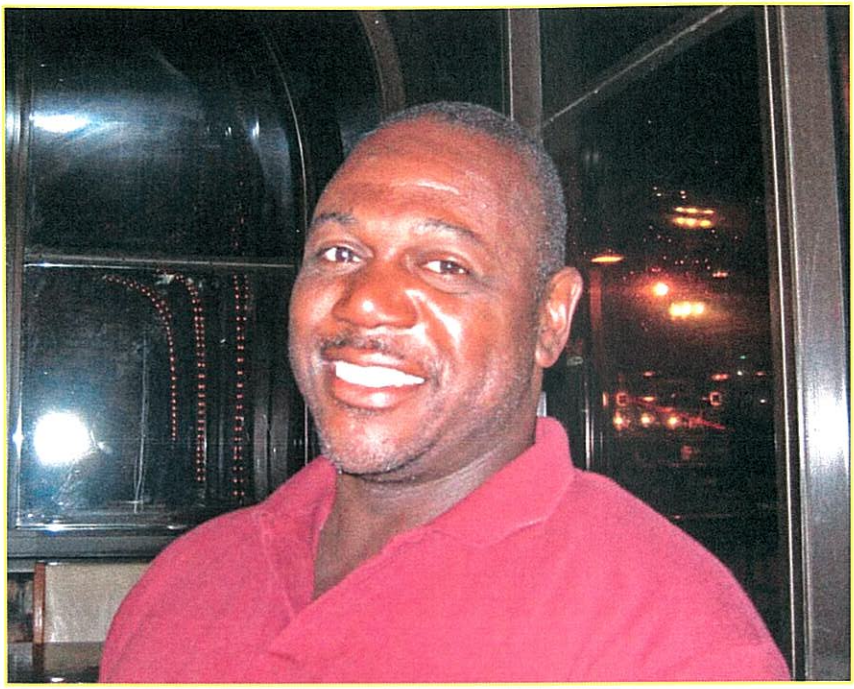
"We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give."

Taria Lewis & Tammy Dufrene

Taria and Tammie, sisters from St. Bernard Parish, evacuated just before Katrina made landfall. On their way out they helped as many of their neighbors as they could to prepare their homes and evacuate – especially the elderly and disabled.

Like so many they prepared to be away from home for about three days. And, like thousands of others, ended up loosing everything in the flood. After spending many months in Arkansas, never feeling settled, the sisters decided they had to get home – to Louisiana. Taria decided to let her home in Arabi be demolished, it was beyond repair. Tammie works on her home in Chalmette, on the weekends, living in the upstairs while gutting the lower level for eventual repair. They found homes now in the River Parishes, near the town of Springfield.

These two sisters have become strong supporters of St. Bernard residents displaced to Livingston parish, providing encouragement, information and guidance to their once-neighbors searching for a new sense of community. Through their hard work, and positive example, they have succeeded in planting the seeds of community, and empowerment, in their new home. They are truly heroes, positive leaders, and courageous humble women.



Michael Cage

Michael Cage and his wife Annette Berry donated money and provided food for local residents in need immediately after Katrina. They began to minister to area families in crowded and distraught situations within days of the storm. For 12 weeks he and his wife visited household after household on a daily basis, even receiving calls at all hours of the night. They were counseling area residents and their guests. Helping any way they could to promote harmony. To address concerns of his flock, he created a prayer board for missing family members. Individuals were invited to place names of family members they were waiting and anxious to hear from on the board. The congregation prayed for their health and safety. Each one of the people of concern was located safe and healthy. After two weeks he and his wife also became involved with his brother's church, which is located in Hammond. They joined truck loads of volunteers cutting trees off of houses and clearing pathways in Covington and Mandeville. This kept his mind and hands busy and was the activity he most enjoyed. Later he and his wife worked with FEMA to provide assessments of homes damaged by Katrina. This he found to be the most profoundly affecting experience of his life. As troubling as it was, it was work he felt he had to do.

Tracy Robertson

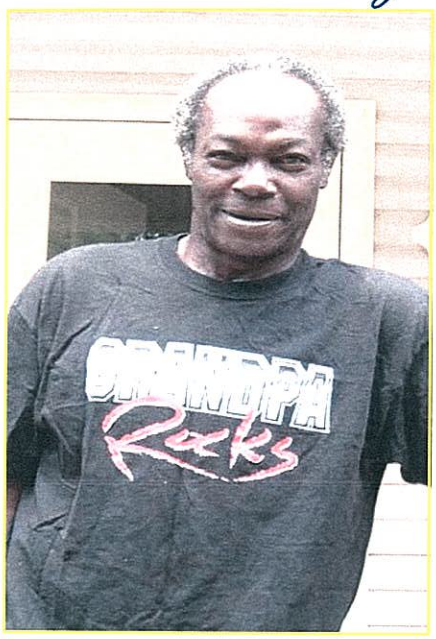
Tracy Robertson was helping local residents at the Community Center shelter with he mother and father on August 29th 2005. They were operating under Red Cross Guidelines to provide shelter for nearby residents. A few local families showed up who lived in mobile homes or structurally weak houses and had no other available refuge. For three days she and other shelter volunteers served the food previously provided by the Red Cross. After three days the food ran out and the shelter was closed. They sent everyone back home. Electricity had been restored to the Hospital and the nearby Bank, where Tracy works, so she returned to her job. She found out later that evening that the shelter had to be reopened. Many residents who had been in the shelter could not go home and more residents were unable to stay in their homes due to the damage Katina wrecked. People were even showing up from Kenner and New Orleans. They couldn't afford to keep paying for a hotel, and couldn't go back home to New Orleans. She found herself working full time, caring for her family and helping at the shelter. There were over 100 people sleeping in a facility meant for 30. An uprooted tree had disrupted the main water line in town and Tracy and others were using collected rain water to flush toilets. Tracy found herself on Potty Duty serving the shelter occupants. She did this, and other responsibilities, without complaint for several weeks. She extended a caring, nurturing hand, lent a sympathetic ear, and provided whatever support she had to the displaced people who found their way to the shelter.

WASHINGTON PARISH

Joe & Sharon Kelly

A married couple of 30 years from the sleepy town of Spring City, Tennessee moved in to Franklinton, LA to help with rebuilding efforts. Sharon and Joe Kelly made a year long commitment to volunteer their time, services and many talents to help the residents of Washington parish who experienced devastation from Hurricane Katrina to rebuild their homes, lives and hopes. Sharon spends her time coordinating volunteer groups, organizing files and doing case management; while Joe works several hours each day on data entry and grant writing. Both Sharon and Joe are also active in the Trinity Baptist Church Community. WEROC (Washington Parish Emergency Recovery Ongong Cadre) as well as the entire community has realized the benefits of this hopeful, fun-loving, energized couple. As busy as they are in Louisiana, Sharon and Joe still find the time and energy to remain involved in the lives of their two children and two grandchildren back home.

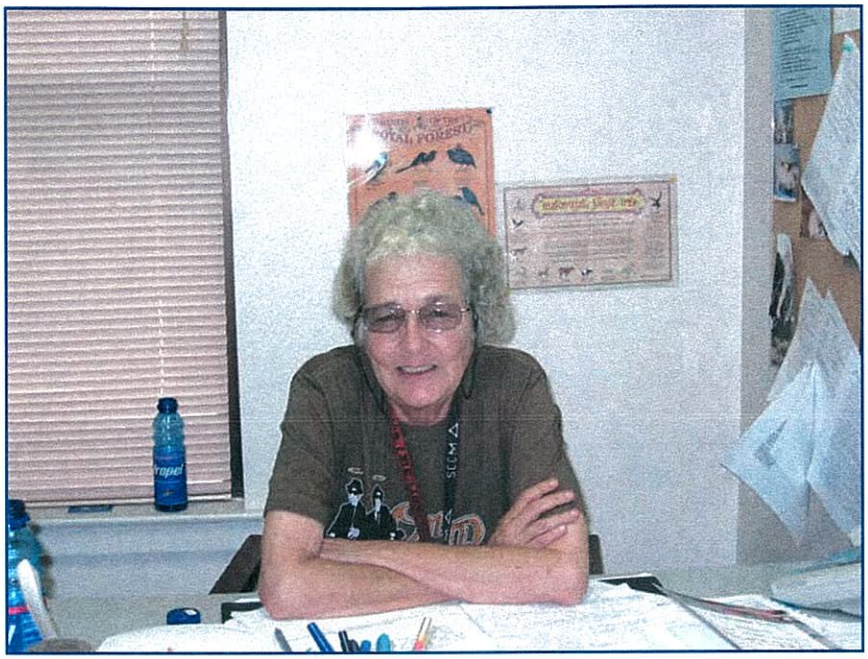
"Goodness is the only investment that never fails."



Charles Certain

Charles Certain can be described as a CHAMPION, a CULTURAL WARRIOR, and most of all, a LOVING HUSBAND and FATHER/GRANDFATHER. Charles and his wife, Faye, have been married for 30 years and adopted their for grandchildren, ages 1,4,6, and 7 years. During Hurricane Katrina Charles and Faye decided to stay in their home in Covington. They had no utilities for weeks, as did everyone else in their area. Charles would ride his bike throughout the area to find people in need of water and food, and deliver to them their most urgent needs. Charles went to the ATM machine and withdrew $200 to buy the water, food and ice that was so desperately needed. As Charles continued to take care of others and his family, he found that his money and resources were coming to an end. Charles began to pray, as he has always had a strong faith, and all of a sudden an eighteen wheeler appeared in his neighborhood and began to distribute food, water and clothing. Charles told the men that he only wanted to take what he needed because their were so many people, even sick people with far greater needs than his. They asked Charles if he knew where they were and he said that he would direct them . The men came back within an hour with another eighteen wheeler full of food, ice, water, and clothing. They backed it up to Charles house and told him to take what he wanted, and he helped them to distribute the rest to those in need.

One day Charles was riding his bike on the Trace and met a man living under the bridge. He was hungry, so Charles brought him food, water, and clothes. Charles prayed with him and encouraged him to get a job, which he did. The man is now working in New Orleans making $17 hr. and living in his own apartment. He comes over to visit with Charles periodically. He told Charles that it was his loving kindness and prayers that gave him the faith to believe better things were going to happen. Charles said "Don't thank me, thank God. Charles is truly a man of great faith who is always giving of his heart to others everyday, because he says there is always someone who needs encouragement.



Jackie Badon

Jackie Badon moved to St. Helena parish 33 years ago. She received her license in Clinical Social Work [LCSW] and counseling and is committed to quality dignified care to promote best quality of life for elderly residents. She administers the "Senior Care Program" of St. Helena Parish which has quadrupled clients since Hurricane Katrina. Other recent contributions include donation of office space and supplies for LA Spirit employees to optimize their effectiveness in the area.

Jackie helped form and chairs the St. Helena Parish Human Services Coalition which has given a platform to state, federal and [most importantly] local non-profit and social service organizations. Among attendees have been representatives from the American Red Cross, FEMA, ST. Vincent DePaul and Catholic Charities Katrina Aid Today Case Management, Louisiana Answers, Homeland Security, Louisiana Governors' Office, Pastors of local churches, Volunteers of America Greater New Orleans Louisiana Spirit St Helena Parish Team, St. Helena Parish Counsel on Aging, St Helena Parish Quad Area, St. Helena Parish Library, Office of Family Support, St. Helena Rural School Based Health nurse and counselors, St Helena Parish School Board members, and New Beginnings Ministry of St. Helena Parish. Because of these meetings St. Helena Parish has had access to a locally unprecedented degree of mental health services and social services which were not being accessed by parish residents until after Katrina. The Coalition sponsors the Unmet Needs Committee, which extends the Coalitions ability to address support of local insufficiencies.

Jackie has provided support for colleagues and beneficial programs despite scarcity of services, professional development and availability of highly educated, licensed and certified personnel.

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."