



# Rebuilding Hope

## One House at a Time

BY SUSAN JACKSON DOWD

Betty Grunstra had it in her mind that the Churchwide Coordinating Team of Presbyterian Women (CCT) should do something about the effects of Hurricane Katrina. The CCT was meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, in March, 2006, and Betty, then chair of the national Search Committee, suggested the group go on a work trip to New Orleans. The idea was enthusiastically received, and Sherry Flyr, synod representative from Synod of the Rocky Mountains (now vice moderator for mission) and Kathy Randall, synod representative from Synod of the Sun, began making arrangements. Kathy, a resident of New Orleans and member of St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church, contacted RHINO (Rebuilding Hope in New Orleans), an outreach ministry of her church. RHINO assists Presbyterian churches and their members as well as the greater New Orleans community by removing property and dry-wall from damaged homes and

facilities—work that can cost individuals as much as \$12,000.

Four months later, a 26-member team of Presbyterian Women, and members of Racial Ethnic Young Women Together and the National Network of Presbyterian College Women, embarked on a six-day work trip into the August heat of New Orleans. The group spent two days removing personal belongings and tearing out drywall in a New Orleans East home; one day working in Musicians' Village, a Habitat for Humanity construction site in the Upper Ninth Ward; and two days touring flood-affected areas in New Orleans and Mississippi.

### Listening While You Work

The work of deconstruction and construction was interspersed with opportunities for listening and learning. Colonel Patricia M. Prechter, the Louisiana National Guard registered nurse who was in charge of special needs patients who were brought to the Superdome during Katrina and her

aftermath, spent time with our group. "The people kept coming," she said of the unexpected numbers of residents who came to the facility for shelter. Now more than 50 percent of the population of New Orleans is dispersed; those remaining are struggling to reestablish their lives and their city.

RHINO staff taught the group how to tear out drywall while educating us on the personal and social dynamics of the disaster. We were encouraged to approach our task with the respect due someone who has experienced profound loss. Trash laboriously hauled from a flood-damaged home carries the intricacies of human lives.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is working from several camps in the Mississippi Gulf Coast area. Volunteer coordinators in two of the camps told us that Mississippi has been forgotten though the effects of Katrina are profound. The Old Towne section of Bay St. Louis, a sleepy beach community, was washed away. The remnants are in the water, just below Main Street.



Photos by Susan Jackson Dowd

Pictured above: (L to R) Jean Vieten, Monica Lin, Doreen Dern-McLeod, Roberta Mansfield, Aline Theodoro, Judia Forman, Jean Vieten and Catreliia Hunter

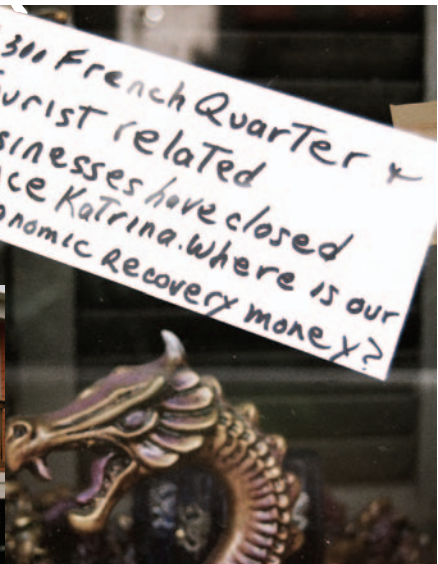
**What Now?**

More than a year after the hurricane, residents and leaders in the affected areas stress that the most needed resource is people. For the long term, return of the population is critical. For now, visitors provide the necessary volunteer base for rebuilding efforts, support the local economy, promote communication, and provide

critical encouragement for the uncertain and discouraged residents of the city.

“The devastation in New Orleans and surrounding areas is so much greater than we ever imagined. It was so important for PW to see the destruction, hear the stories of survival and triumph, work with other volunteers in clean-up and rebuilding efforts,

and to return home to share the stories and encourage others to go and help with restoration. It is my hope that Presbyterian Women and others throughout our denomination will send teams to support and assist with the work that must be done to rebuild this historic city and other areas throughout the Gulf Coast.”—Catreliia Hunter, national PW moderator



Photos by Susan Jackson Dowd

## On behalf of the residents of New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast,

I sincerely thank PW for living out the meaning of “being an inclusive caring community.”

Your leadership in saying “we came because we care” has lifted the spirits of so many. Your faith-based example of hard work and tender reassurance mirrored God’s love. Together there is HOPE.

—Kathy Randall



Photo by Kate Elkins

Work team members gather with local hosts on the steps of the St. Charles’ Avenue Presbyterian Church Land Building, used to house RHINO volunteer groups.

### Here’s What You Can Do

Through spring 2007, RHINO work teams will be tearing out drywall and plaster for uninsured and underinsured homeowners in the New Orleans area, whose homes were ravaged by floodwaters in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Teams will also assist with personal property and debris removal. St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church in New Orleans owns a facility that can house up to 30 volunteers. Room and board is \$15 per person per day. Participants pay for transportation and some meals. RHINO is the acronym for Restore Hope in New Orleans, a relief effort of St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church. Additional RHINO information is available at [www.scapc.org](http://www.scapc.org) or 504/897-0101.



Photo by Susan Jackson Dowd

Churchwide Coordinating Team members Margaret Welsh (left), Cindy Joe and Fran Anderson take a break from “mucking” out a home in the New Orleans East neighborhood where PW volunteered for RHINO in August.



Photo by Susan Jackson Dowd

Pearlington, Mississippi, work site volunteers Dave Robinson (left) and Jean “Dallas” Tremmell talk to the PW work group about the work of the camp and the importance of building relationships with area residents needing help.

Volunteer Villages, a part of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance’s eight-year commitment to the Gulf Coast, create opportunities for volunteers, survivors and local congregations to work in partnership and cultivate relationships that will enable a collective and longterm recovery in the Gulf Coast area. To find out more about PDA’s work in the area, and how you can participate, visit [www.pcusa.org/katrina](http://www.pcusa.org/katrina) or call 866/732-6121.