



**Habitat
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of Rhode Island -
Greater Providence, Inc.

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Why is this woman smiling? See page 3



FALL 2008

www.habitatprov.org

Rebuilding New Orleans with Joan D'Arc and the promise of a Snow Cone

We received the following article from a volunteer from Providence who worked with Habitat in New Orleans, and we felt it worthwhile to share it with you.

By Peter J. Lyons

The Crape Myrtle is my new friend. Perched between the shell-scraped Louisiana soil and the high bayou sun, this shrub is my only source of shade. It provides a respite as I work at a Habitat for Humanity site in St. Bernard Parish.

Shade to me is now spelled with a capital "S." Next to water, it's my most precious commodity. Draped in a wet towel which shields my face as well as most of my sight, I am concentrating on the small crushed white shells in the driveway, hoping I won't pass out.

This is Pastor Ben Alderman's Crape Myrtle. The house the AmeriCorps workers and I are framing sits directly opposite his home. "If you'd like, you can use the porch," he says, "and sit in one of these rocking chairs."

I have traveled to New Orleans to honor my self-promise of helping the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Clad in shorts and sporting a utility belt and hammer, I arrive at Camp Hope, home of the AmeriCorps volunteers. Dwayne, a young foreman, tells us in his orientation speech that "If you only hammer one nail, that's one more than we had yesterday. If you only hammer one board, that's one more board than we had yesterday."

I feel relieved: I know I'm going to hammer at least two nails.

Almost three years after Hurricane

Katrina hit New Orleans and the surrounding region, the reconstruction is ongoing. Much of the work is being performed by 18-25 year-old women.

Committed to at least a year in the AmeriCorps, they have partnered with the local coastal council and Habitat for Humanity to revive St. Bernard Parish.

I marvel at their stamina. I think of the bronze statue of Joan D'Arc on Decatur Street, herself a 19-year-old leader of France. She would be proud of these soldiers. She calls them into her army to recover New Orleans.

I am to hammer nails today. We're standing on a foundation about three feet above the ground. It's part of the latest requirement that all new constructions have foundations three-to-six feet



higher than the earth. I begin in earnest. Shortly after the first hour of work, I wipe the handle of my hammer against my shorts. There's too much sweat. When my shorts are soaked, I move

the drying process to my shirt. It's hard to hammer if one doesn't have a dry palm-to-handle surface. The efficiency of the strike decreases, resulting in more swings and effort. A thought occurs to me—I haven't a stitch of dry clothing on me and the sweat is beginning to blur my vision.

This is a different type of heat than I have ever experienced. Having lived in the moderating ocean air currents of New England all of my life, I am shocked by the near 100 degree heat and high humidity. Mid-morning, I feel dizzy, and this is what introduces me to

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Volunteer Spotlight



Dave Gray

Dave's Daughter-in-Law "volunteered" him three years ago to be a site supervisor for a house that Realtor Residential Properties sponsored. He's stayed on since to supervise additional houses, and has been tapped as a "closer" to supervise the last construction and detail stages of three other houses.

After retiring from an eight-year stint as an Executive Director for a non-profit Newspaper Design Association, and a 28 year career at the Providence Journal, Dave had on his "retired list of things to do" to volunteer for Habitat. Dave says, "I thank my Daughter-in-Law for getting me to actually do it!"

Dave likes the challenge of working with volunteers, as well as the "feel good" aspects of the work that Habitat does. He says the volunteers and the "regulars" he has met are good people who come to the variety of tasks with an even larger variety of skills and motivations.

We certainly appreciate the years Dave has worked with us and the Habitat families, and we hope he'll stay with us for a very long time. Not only is he a great site supervisor, but with his skills as a graphic designer, he has transformed the look of our newsletter.

Continued from Page One

the Crape Myrtle. On the sidelines while my colleagues continue to toil, my thinking is that it is better not to faint than to faint and stop all the activity.

On the deck, the AmeriCorps crew bounces from task to task—measuring, sawing, hammering, lifting walls into place. They sprint and hang from rafters and don't seem to take breaks. Each site works as a core team, aided by the occasional busload of young ministry groups.

"I feel blessed." I will hear Pastor Alderman say this at least 10 times in my two-day conversations with him. Pastor Alderman's home was completely destroyed, forcing him to live in a Motel 6 for two months. He has befriended me, probably because of the poor shape in which he found me. He proudly wears a Drew Brees New Orleans Saints shirt. "I feel blessed," he continues. "I received a phone call from a clerical friend of mine. He said he was at my house. I said I don't have a house. Well, he said, there are 75 people here with me and we're rebuilding your home. I feel blessed!"

"Everyone's welcome to use my porch. And the ladies can use our bathrooms." I feel like an ambassador as I deliver this news to Aaron, our site leader, young enough to be carded at any pub. The Crape Myrtle, and its shade, led me this way. And the next day, Pastor Alderman gave us his leftover nails when we depleted our supply.

"Our levees held," continued Pastor Alderman. "The problem was with the Intracoastal Waterway. Years ago the Army Corps of Engineers dredged a shortcut from the sea to the city. The storm surge caused the seawater to go over the levees."

Saint Bernard Parish sits below sea level but the French Quarter does not. This parish, like many others, used to be protected by the mangrove and cypress trees which grew here. Over time these natural buffers and marshes were depleted, resulting in a loss of about 20 square miles of wetlands. The Intracoastal Waterway unwittingly rolled out a welcome mat for Hurricane Katrina.

Bets were placed on me that I

wouldn't return from lunch. If I thought the high morning bayou sun was hot, the afternoon's was worse. My forearm cramped from the hammering and again forced me off the deck. I did what I could to be useful—picking up the discarded cans with their unflattering government "Drinking Water" labels and straightening out the bent nails.

Zach, a native of New Orleans, lifted my spirits with tales of the crew's elixir: snow cones, or in the native vernacular, "snowballs." They're delicious, ice-cold, and you can get sweet cream topped on them. Zach is the native face of the effort to revive his home. Young, tall, handsome with windswept blond hair suggesting a long-board ride off the Baja coast, he symbolizes the energy and commitment of this young movement. With Joan D'Arc, the Crape Myrtle shade, and the promise of a snow cone, I am spurred on and somehow meet the end of the workday.

Small, pretty pastel-colored huts dot the countryside, beckoning the traveler to stop for a snow cone. I feel like royalty as I scan the flavors and options in a just-changed dry tee-shirt. I choose a blueberry/raspberry snow cone with sweet cream on top. Heavenly is the first taste of this velvet-textured icy treat as I cradle the paper cup. Zach was right.

At the end of the week, I ceremoniously hand my work belt and best hammer to Zach. Palms upraised with the belt lying evenly over my forearms, a surprised Zach accepts the offering and thanks me. He has his own shield now, and a part of me will stay in New Orleans.

Although my effort involved traveling to New Orleans, it's not difficult for anyone to be a part of this recovery process. A card, note, or email of greeting to Camp Hope would suffice.

But if you go, try a cream-topped snow cone. Tell them Zach sent you.

Editor's Note: For information about volunteer opportunities with Habitat for Humanity's ongoing Katrina relief efforts, visit <http://www.habitat.org> or call 1-800-422-4828.

Author Peter J. Lyons of Providence, R.I., may be reached at (401) 556-3028.

Update from the Sites:

(Home sponsor or primary volunteer group is noted in parentheses.)

47 Capron Street

(Youth Build Providence 2006-08)

Completed. The house was dedicated on February 2, 2008.

815 Potters Avenue

(Women Build Initiative/Lowe's)

Completed. With thanks to the women from the ACI who worked two days a week and all the other volunteers, men and women, who put so much of their time and energy into this house. The dedication was March 29, 2008.

17 Handy Street

(Bike & Build 2006)

Completed. This house was dedicated on August 9, 2008. Landscaping will be completed in September.

11 Miner Street

(Providence Place Mall)

Interior finishing, closets, painting, porch, deck, fence and landscaping work remain.

577 Public Street

(Bike & Build 2007)

Our latest project is a duplex in South Providence. Wall and roof framing is in progress. We expect to have the walls up and the roof on by October.

Bottom two and page 4 photos by Colleen Fox Choiniere



The Yubran family on Capron St. receive house keys and a bible from Habitat President William Dibiasio on February 2.



Above: Kathy O'Malley, from Women Build, congratulates Sheila White on her Potters Ave. house. The Governor (left) and Mrs. Carcieri attended the dedication on March 29.

Left: The August 9 dedication on Handy Street for Jose Roman and Maricelis Quiñones.

Many thanks to our supporters...

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 - Ed Wojcik Architects
 - YouthBuild, Providence

How to contribute and get more involved:

Visit us on our new
Web Site

<http://www.habitatprov.org>

- Site updates
- Contact information
- Volunteer opportunities

**Wanted:
 LAND**

If you see any in the Providence area during your travels, call the office at (401) 831-5424.

VOLUNTEERING

Rhode Island ranks as one of the lowest in the country in volunteer hours. You can help change that by becoming a regular volunteer on a Habitat site and help build houses for families in need. **Instant gratification and tangible results.** (You will feel good about yourself, we guarantee it.)



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 and use it as a **TAX DEDUCTION.**
 For more information, go to
<http://www.habitat.org/carforhomes/>

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ALL HANDS ON DECK: Roof trusses and an end gable are raised on the second floor walls at one of our Providence houses.