

# Houston HISTORY

VOLUME 7 • NUMBER 3 • SUMMER 2010

## Houston's Helping Hand: Remembering Katrina



UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Our Director of Oral History at the Center for Public History, Ernesto Valdés, conceived the idea of doing a commemorative issue on Houston's response to Hurricane Katrina almost immediately after the storm. He began the interviews in 2006 and completed the final one just before his death earlier this year. This issue, published on the fifth anniversary of Katrina's landfall on August 29, 2005, is the product of Ernesto's vision.

Mayor Bill White and Judge Robert Eckels took the lead in coordinating the efforts to respond to the needs of several hundred

thousand people who came to the Houston area to escape Katrina's devastation. Mayor White kept an exacting schedule, but at the same time, remained sensitive to the needs of the evacuees. His direct and humane approach set the tone for all of those in the region who opened their hearts and even their homes to those displaced. For example, the Hurricane Katrina Relief Working Group minutes dated September 7, 2005, quoted White as saying: "A person at the back of the line seeking benefits needs to know the same information as the guy at the front. We don't want someone waiting to find out they don't meet the necessary requirements. That's not how we do busi-

ness in Houston, Texas."

During a time of great human need, our city provided a model of how strong leaders can help harness the best efforts of government, business, and private organizations to respond to emergencies. Houston's response to Katrina also reminds us that most effective emergency responses in America are essentially local, and that they rely on the tradition of volunteerism that has served our nation well throughout its history.

On June 7, 2010, Mayor White provided his reflections for *Houston History* on how the city stepped up to provide assistance to the many in need.

## MAYOR BILL WHITE REMEMBERS KATRINA ON THE STORM'S FIFTH ANNIVERSARY



Former Houston Mayor, Bill White. Photo courtesy of Bill White.

**I**t was obvious to me when the levies broke that we were going to be a sanctuary for our fellow Americans who had lost everything. . . . I understood that we were the closest big city that would become a new home for many, many people. . . . No city, no community, had the experience of dealing with 200,000 people that were not just seeking refuge from a storm but had lost their city. . . . I was in problem solving mode . . . [and] knew that if we appealed to the better nature of our citizens that we would get a very broad and deep, committed response to that, which we did. I think the whole world watched and wondered as people within our community came together at a time when the response within the state of Louisiana and the federal government was not very efficient. . . .

Even before the storm, when it was clear that [the evacuees] would be here for some time, I articulated the simple policies of our city. We would want to treat our neighbors as we would like to be treated, and that meant we would give people the chance to live with independence and dignity by working for employment [and] getting their kids in school; for those who were seniors or disabled, we would be their safety net. . . . There were some naysayers at the outset; but we got broad sup-

port, particularly the support that crossed party lines, the support from the faith-based community, and from the business community. As businesses saw . . . what other businesses were doing, and being asked to do, . . . much of the initial opposition dissipated. People saw this as an opportunity for us to do something that was right for our country as well as for our fellow Americans.

We showed that you can be . . . competent and efficient and compassionate at the same time . . . Too often in the political arena the ideas of compassion and efficiency are not married in the way that we were able to put them together in the efforts after Katrina. We also believe in self sufficiency and work, and not dependency and entitlement, that is part of our heritage in Texas and belief in a limited government. . . . When I met with the evacuees, I emphasized that there were roles and responsibilities that we each had. Our responsibility, which we undertook, was to make sure that people had shelter over their heads, utilities, furnishings, [access to] transit lines, and an opportunity for employment if they were able bodied. Their responsibility was to get their kids in school, look forward and not back. We would help people return [to New Orleans]; but if they weren't able to return, then, to seek employment within this community and to help us identify those people who were engaged in criminal activity, which is a violation of the rights of others. That was a Houston style of giving people a hand up, not a hand out.

Sometimes I had to remind my fellow citizens . . . when somebody was living in the shelter, they had as much right to live here as anyone else in this community, that most Houstonians had come from somewhere else. If somebody was in a shelter, then we were in their home, not vice versa. . . . There were other parts of the country that segregated people into trailer homes. At one time, FEMA wanted to herd people into a large cruise ship in Galveston, which would have the tendency to isolate people. Dr. Ken Maddox from Ben Taub said that after these mentally traumatic disasters you see a spike in suicides about a

week to three weeks out because people had left everything—their housing, their families, their neighborhoods, their employment. Once the adrenalin and the trauma were over, then there was a feeling of helplessness. But you didn't see that here because people felt they were part of the community, that others cared for them, and that they could have a chance to get on with their lives. . . .

I was particularly touched by several comments I received from people, mainly older people who were African American, who I met in the year after Katrina. . . . The first person who shared her story said that in her lifetime, she had seen many changes. She had seen laws change, she had seen the end of official segregation; but deep in her heart, she doubted. She wondered whether attitudes had really changed . . . to really live the ideal that every person is created in the image of God and is no more worthy than another; she wondered if we had emerged from that history of racism in our city. When she saw the response of people taking [people from] very different backgrounds, income levels, and ethnicities into their homes, and the outpouring of support where so many Houstonians simply saw fellow Americans—even while the media was trying to characterize it as something racial. . . —she said, "You know, this has changed." . . . She told me, "You have really forged a real multi-ethnic city." . . .

[Houston has] a tradition of civic leadership with mayors going back to Mayor [Louie] Welch who thought that civil rights, and certainly racial diversity, could be a strength of our city and not a liability. We had a strong faith-based community that played an important role in desegregation . . . Even more diverse are the people we have, Houstonians who were citizens . . . who had come from all over the world. We are more diverse than we have ever been before. Many people saw that as a strength. . . . When people realized how much they had in common, or could have in common, with various people who did not have a home to go back to, the whole world applauded the way that we responded. . . . That is an enduring legacy. 🍷

# Houston History

VOLUME 7 • NUMBER 3 SUMMER 2010

## Houston's Helping Hand: Remembering Katrina

### EDITORIAL STAFF

Joseph A. Pratt, *Editor-in-Chief*  
Debbie Harwell, *Managing Editor*  
Aimee L'Heureux, *Associate Editor*  
Kristin Deville, *Program Coordinator*  
Marsha Van Horn, *Designer*

### ADVISORY BOARD

Kathleen Brosnan	William Kellar
Betty Trapp Chapman	Fred Korge
Barbara Eaves	Martin Melosi
Steven Fenberg	Jim Saye

### EDITORIAL POLICY

*Houston History* is published three times a year by the Center for Public History in the History Department at the University of Houston. We welcome manuscripts, interviews, and photographic essays on the history and culture of the Houston region, broadly defined, as well as ideas for topical issues. All correspondence should be sent to *Houston History*, University of Houston, Center for Public History, 547 Agnes Arnold Hall, Houston, TX 77204-3007 (713-743-3123), or emailed to: [HoustonHistory@uh.edu](mailto:HoustonHistory@uh.edu).

Subscriptions are \$10 per year for students, \$15 per year for individuals, and \$25 per year for institutions. Single issues and back issues are available for \$10. Visit [www.history.uh.edu/houstonhistory](http://www.history.uh.edu/houstonhistory) for additional information.

© 2010 by the Center for Public History. All rights reserved. Reproduction of this issue or any portion of it is expressly prohibited without written permission of the publisher. The Center for Public History disclaims responsibility for statements of fact and opinions of contributors.

**POSTMASTER** send address changes to:

University of Houston  
Center for Public History  
547 Agnes Arnold Hall  
Houston, TX 77204-3007

**Cover Photo:** Artwork by Courtney Persse, daughter of Dr. David Persse. Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Frank McBride: Covering Katrina from  
New Orleans to Houston Page 2  
*Interview by Ernesto Valdés*

Judge Robert Eckels: "We can do whatever  
we have to . . ." Page 4  
*Interview by David Goldstein*

Michael Moore: Marshaling Houston's  
Resources to Make a Difference Page 6  
*Interview by Ernesto Valdés*

Mark Sloan: "The voice of calm,"  
Coordinating Volunteers Page 12  
*Interview by Ernesto Valdés*

Rev. Eric Hystad: Operation Compassion  
at the George R. Brown Page 14  
*Interview by Ernesto Valdés*

Serving the Medical Needs of Houston's  
"Guest Citizens" Page 17  
*Conversations with Dr. Kenneth Mattox, David Lopez,  
Dr. David Persse, Diana Rodriguez, and Ernesto Valdés*

Claire Bassett: Incorporating Tulane Medical  
School with Baylor College of Medicine Page 25  
*Interview by Ernesto Valdés*

William Reed: Using Technology to Find  
Lost Loved Ones Page 28  
*Interview by Jenna Berger*

Hope and Sorrow: Notes from the  
Dome Floor Page 30  
*Featuring selections from interviews in this issue*

FEMA: No Surprise, No Consensus Page 35  
*Featuring selections from interviews in this issue*

Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston Page 37  
*Conversations with Shari Smothers, Marie Barney,  
Glenda Harris, and Linda Jeffers*

University of Houston: Contributions to  
the Katrina Effort Page 41  
*By Aimee L'Heureux*

News Updates and Books Page 43  
*By Barbara Eaves*

All interviews in this issue are housed in Special Collections at the M. D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston unless otherwise noted.



# Frank McBride: Covering Katrina from New Orleans to Houston

Frank McBride went to San Jacinto College and received his degree in radio, television, and film from the University of Houston in 1988. Houston's KHOU-TV, Channel 11, sent him to cover Hurricane Katrina with reporter Janice Williamson because of McBride's previous experience working in New Orleans. On their return, he covered the shelters at both the Astrodome and the George R. Brown Convention Center. His story sets the stage for understanding the trauma the people from New Orleans had faced before they arrived in Houston. Ernesto Valdés interviewed Frank McBride on June 16, 2006.



*When the levees broke and the flooding began, Frank McBride and Janice Williamson of Channel 11 accompanied Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries boats to help rescue people in New Orleans from their rooftops and attics.*

Photo courtesy of NOAA.

**FRANK McBRIDE (FM):** When we were driving out, Janice and I were listening to WWL on AM radio out of New Orleans, and they were doing their, “everyone needs to evacuate” . . . Having worked there, I was kind of discounting the seriousness in their warnings. I was talking to Janice, saying, “You know, the whole time I was there, it was always ‘this is the big one’ any time a storm came.” I was saying, “But it is their job. They have to make people aware that there is a danger. It is probably not going to be as big a deal as they are making it sound like.” I think back on that now, and . . . I think it is very ironic. I was thinking that they were overstating the seriousness of it. Now, I think it was appropriate, if not maybe less than it really was.

The reports we were hearing from New Orleans were a little more severe but didn’t sound like they had been hit terribly hard. . . . Our plan was to go and see how far we could get. We headed out Interstate 10.

As we got to where the Huey P. Long Bridge feeds into River Road, . . . we encountered a convoy, and it was mostly [Louisiana Department of] Wildlife and Fisheries boats being pulled by trucks and pick-ups and all their different equipment. . . . We joined in with this convoy and followed them in. . . . We were able to accompany one of the relief efforts. There were people all around this area that were standing on the roofs, some

of them by themselves, some of them in groups. [They got] as many people as they could get into the boat, asked them where [there were] other people they knew needed rescuing. They were trying to keep records of all these things. It was really hard for them to keep track of who had been rescued. The thing that really struck me was, shortly after they would launch, they would find people immediately, and the boat would fill up, and they would have to return and let them out.

They would try to remember where people had been before that they weren’t able to pick up, or that they had been told needed rescuing. Each time they went out, maybe they went a little bit further, but they weren’t going very far, just maybe one-quarter of a mile and then back. It was obvious that the problem extended way beyond, several miles. You couldn’t even see where the end of the problem was, houses upon houses in the distance. You start doing the math in your head. If they can only go this short distance before the boat is full and then they return, how long is it going to be before the people that were several miles out get any attention or any help? . . . You could hear people who had gone up into their attics whenever the water was rising on them and had no way to get out.

By the time we had gotten back onto the bridge, and we were seeing the growing group of people who now were rescued from



their homes but didn't know where to go, we were feeling exhausted after just two hours. We [were] feeling dehydrated and needed some relief. At that point, it struck me: these people have been here . . . when the sun came up this morning, they were out there on their roofs, or in their attics, and the storm had caused the water to start coming up; so some of these people were heading on maybe eighteen, twenty hours in those conditions with direct exposure to the sun or the stifling heat inside their attics. The scope of the problem was really starting to hit me at that point. If I am feeling this badly after just two hours riding on a boat, how are these people feeling standing, stranded on their roofs? . . .

We went over into the Superdome area, and there were large numbers of ambulance and emergency personnel staged underneath the elevated freeway right beside the Superdome. . . . They basically were there to help care for the people who were in and around the Superdome area who needed medical attention . . .

The [people] up on the freeway were starting to get pretty desperate at the time that we encountered them. There was no shade, they didn't have any access to water, they had young children with soiled diapers and no way to do anything about that. Things were getting pretty bad, very uncomfortable, and going from uncomfortable to dangerous.

**ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV):** What was your feeling about the fact that you had an ice chest full of water?

**FM:** It was very hard. We ended up trying to be very judicious. When we thought we could safely provide someone some help, we would. Before we went in, we had to strap gas cans to the roof of the car knowing that we might not be able to refuel. . . . In that same area by the Superdome, there was a man who had his whole family packed up in his car . . . but they had no gas. He was saying, "You got some there?" He wasn't insisting, he was just asking. I looked at the situation, didn't see that there was anyone around, like large groups that were going to rush us so, sure, I gave him a can . . . and hoped that that was going to

get him somewhere safer than here. [It was] the same with the water. There were some people that we were able to give them some, but we had to make sure that it wasn't going to set off a big reaction. . . .

The part that nagged at me the most was the immensity. When we were doing the boat rescues, just knowing how, in just the small area where we were, there were so many people, and then you multiply that out to how far the flooding was and you almost immediately come to the conclusion they can't get to all these people in time. And that hurts. It makes you feel very helpless and wonder, is there . . . some way that we can speed up this process and not let these people die a really horrible death . . . because they are exposed and no one can get to them? . . .

**EV:** When you covered the story in Houston, what conditions did you observe inside the Dome?

**FM:** I was very impressed at how organized it was. You know, they had set everyone up in rows. There was obviously a lot of trouble getting people together but as far as giving them places, there didn't seem to be any conflict among the people saying, "I don't have a space." . . . They had a system for how they got their meals. . . . They had rooms full of computers set up for them to come in and try to get their names on databases so family and friends, whoever was trying to contact them, could. Constantly overhead on the speakers, you would hear PA announcements—people's names, trying to find family members, trying to find people that they had lost. . . .

You couldn't count the number of [volunteers] that were out there. They weren't just willing; they were [saying,] "Please, let me help. Let me do something." Whenever they saw the need, they dropped everything and they got themselves out there because there is no way that that operation could have worked without the people who made themselves available to do whatever was needed. It was good to see our city rise up for something like that. 🏹

*Frank McBride commented on how organized the Houston shelters were—from the cot set up to the meal service.* Photo courtesy of Mark Sloan.





# JUDGE ROBERT ECKELS: “WE CAN DO WHATEVER WE HAVE TO...”



*As county judge, Robert Eckels (center) was instrumental in the planning and execution of support for Hurricane Katrina evacuees in Houston.*

*All photos courtesy of Mark Sloan.*

When Robert Eckels was elected county judge, he subsequently became head of Emergency Management of Harris County with responsibilities to develop, maintain, and coordinate an emergency management plan; to activate and staff an Emergency Operations Center (EOC); to develop and assist in effective public outreach programs; to provide information for officials, the media, and residents; and to prepare for emergencies through drills and exercises. David Goldstein interviewed him on July 28, 2008, for the city’s Houston Oral History Project—Mayor Bill White Collection.

**ROBERT ECKELS:** [Emergency preparedness] is not just about response, but it is the coordination. We had done a series of drills every year that was called the hurricane poly exercise. We brought people in and all the county departments went through what they did. . . .

Harris County would come in and bring our resources . . . and try to not serve everybody but coordinate services among service providers. That was a unique function as we became part of a unified command, not a central command, and there is a big difference. . . . To look at what happened in Katrina, you have to go back to the training we did among ourselves and the community. . . .

Our first big test was Tropical Storm Allison. In Tropical Storm Allison, we had actually a more difficult test for Houston than the later Katrina event because it was a quarter of a million of our own people that we were taking out of their homes and having to shelter somewhere. They were not in the Astrodome, but we had 100,000 homes under water. . . . It was the largest urban flood in the history of the United States until Katrina came along. And we responded very well. Not everything was perfect. We learned a lot of lessons in that. . . .

[For Katrina] I got a call about three o’clock in the morning. . . . We had talked [earlier] about the possibility of having a shelter facility at the county. . . . The call came in, and it was, “You know, Judge, we talked about 2,500. We really need 23,750. We are going to evacuate the Superdome and bring them to Houston. Can we do that?” My response was, “We can do whatever we have to do. Start the process.” . . . That morning at six o’clock, we were having our first meetings of the team to respond to the storm, and it was the Harris County response; we weren’t at that time expecting to have to expand beyond the county although the city emergency management director came to our meeting. . . .

The group got together, started planning for the shelter operation in the Astrodome. . . . We had never planned to use the Astrodome for shelter, but we had planned for our group to be able to plan for whatever we needed to do. . . . Fourteen hours later, we were ready and open for the buses from the Superdome. . . . What happened though was it was not an organized evacuation. . . . It was chaos as people came out. The state troopers that had gone to pick up the buses were not met by Louisiana state troopers as they had thought they would be met. . . .





*Judge Eckels spent time with the evacuees from New Orleans who he said “were gracious people.”*



*Judge Eckels believes that the one word that best describes Houston is compassion, and he demonstrated that as he helped the evacuees.*


There were about thirty shelters in the Houston area that were already set up and ready for people from New Orleans . . . But the news reports were out that the Astrodome was a shelter, . . . and they were coming there first. . . . [They] were gracious people who had been traumatized by a storm. They were worn out, they were tired, they were physically compromised, they were emotionally spent, they were trying to find their friends and family. . . .

The real miracle was . . . that we had 60,000 people that were processed through the Dome and moved on to other places—from the very beginning, my vision was that the Dome was not going to become a refugee camp; it was a shelter, and we would quickly move people to a more suitable spot. . . . Many people

still did not want to leave. But we had gotten down after about three weeks to about 1,200 people from that cap of about 30,000 . . . About half of those were problem placements that either had criminal records or physical instabilities or infirmities that were going to require some kind of special housing needs. . . .

You saw the community come together in a way that no one thought possible, so I guess a short, one word description of Houston would be compassion, but it was compassion with the capacity to deliver on that compassion and really make it work for these folks. . . .

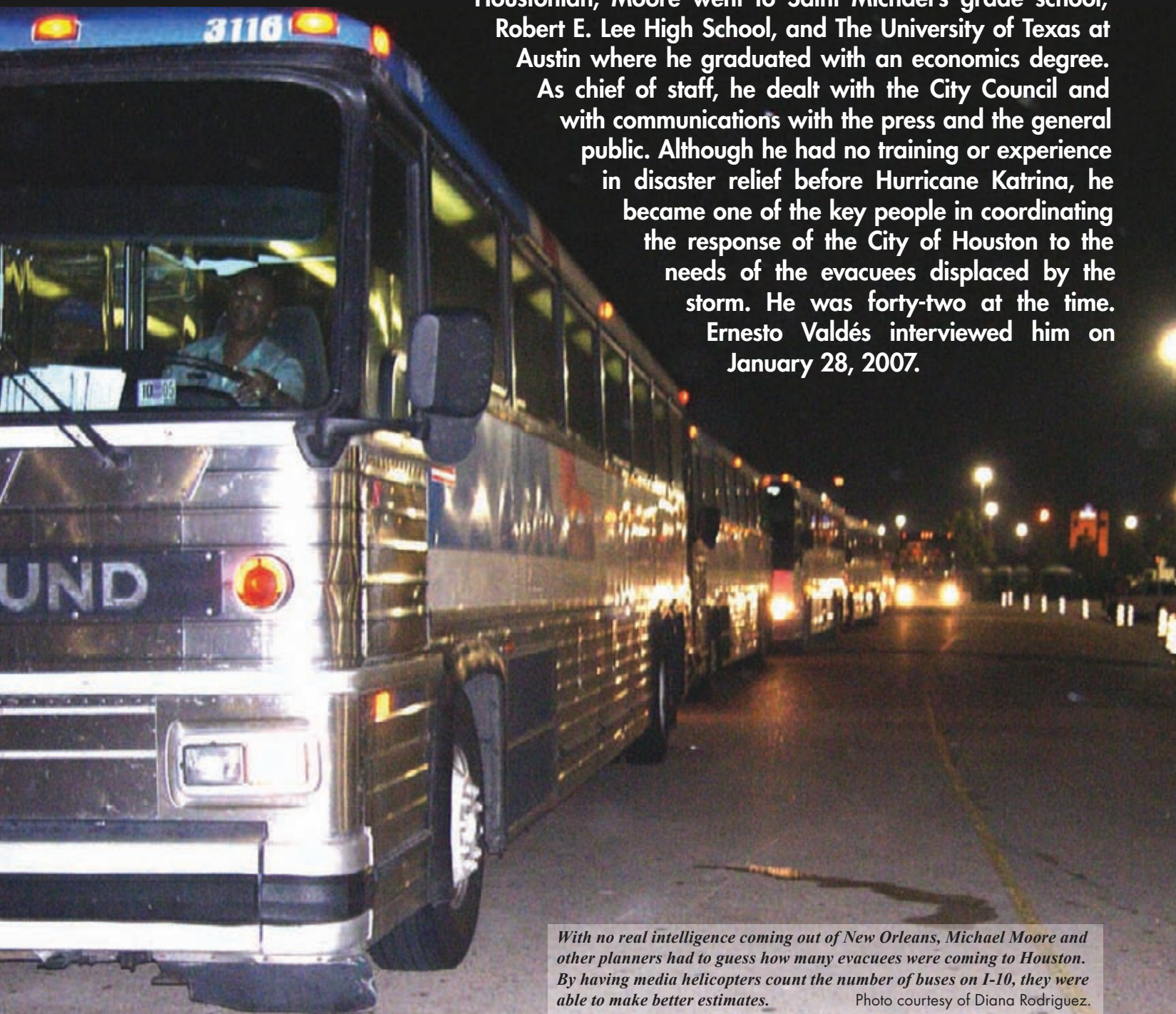
It was not without problems. Ninety percent of the people that came from New Orleans were great folks. What we did find though, as we moved people out, [was] that there was an element that were bad guys too, that came to Houston; and while ninety percent of them were good, ten percent, or maybe a few more, of a quarter million people [was] still 25,000 or so bad guys. . . .

There is a quote in City Hall that [reads] “the people are the city.” And Houston is not really a place. It is a people. We all live here. But it is the people. It is the spirit of the city. And it is evolving as a city. The people are becoming more diverse and there is a lot of talk about the strength of diversity. And I do not really see diversity as a strength or a weakness. Diversity is what it is. It can destroy a city, and you have seen that in some cities. Or it can make a city much stronger. And the challenge of diversity is uniting all of those diverse strengths behind the common vision and a common spirit. We have done that with Hurricane Katrina, and its impact on New Orleans, and our response to that in Houston. . . . If [Houston] will maintain that can-do spirit, the problems don’t get bigger, just the opportunities get bigger, we are going to be a city of big opportunities and, I think, a city that will accomplish great things. 



# MICHAEL MOORE: Marshaling Houston's Resources to Make a Difference

**A**s Mayor Bill White's chief of staff during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Michael Moore was in the eye of the storm of evacuees from New Orleans to Houston. A native Houstonian, Moore went to Saint Michael's grade school, Robert E. Lee High School, and The University of Texas at Austin where he graduated with an economics degree. As chief of staff, he dealt with the City Council and with communications with the press and the general public. Although he had no training or experience in disaster relief before Hurricane Katrina, he became one of the key people in coordinating the response of the City of Houston to the needs of the evacuees displaced by the storm. He was forty-two at the time. Ernesto Valdés interviewed him on January 28, 2007.



*With no real intelligence coming out of New Orleans, Michael Moore and other planners had to guess how many evacuees were coming to Houston. By having media helicopters count the number of buses on I-10, they were able to make better estimates.*

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.



## FIRST DAY

The day before [the opening of the Astrodome to evacuees], Frank Michelle the communications director and I were talking, and I said, “You know we’ve already had a fair number of evacuees that got here on their own. . . . A lot of the rest of the evacuees are coming here. It’s only natural to think we are the largest city within driving distance of New Orleans.”

The next morning . . . Frank calls me up and goes, “They’re coming.” So we had the word, and there was a meeting called at Tran Star. . . . There is an emergency operations center both at Tran Star and at our police department, the 9-1-1 headquarters, HEC the Houston Emergency Center.

We didn’t think they were coming until the next morning, and they started coming early evening. . . . What people don’t understand is . . . [that] the evacuees that came into the mass shelter, which was the Astrodome, Reliant Center, George R. Brown, were a maximum of about 30,000. There were 200,000 plus that came to Houston, somewhere people estimated between 200,000 and 300,000. The rest were in faith-based shelters, hotels, staying in people’s homes, and living in their cars. It wasn’t just all the people at the Astrodome. . . . The symbol of the evacuees being here and [the] focal point for the national media; . . . those were just the ones that basically came out of the Superdome.



*At the Astrodome, medical tents were set up outside to ensure immediate attention to those in need.*

One of the biggest problems . . . [was] intelligence coming out of New Orleans. Nobody could tell us how many buses were coming, and they just kept coming. Then we would hear, “You’re not getting any more tonight.” Well, they would keep coming. . . . We basically had to say it was full at one point in time. We had to start sending buses to San Antonio, and Austin, and other places. . . .

There was one time they tried to do that, and everybody just jumped off the bus and said, “I’m not going anywhere else.” Then we set up an area outside of the Astrodome on the other

side of Kirby where we actually had tents, we had food, we had water, and we got everybody off the bus. . . . Some people came with just trash bags full of stuff. They had nothing else. There were clothes there, . . . [a] bathroom; whatever they needed to do. We had doctors there to check people out if they were seniors because a lot of people that came on the buses were special needs, older, disabilities. We sat down and talked to them and said, “Look we are full here, but we are going to feed you. We are going to put you back on a clean bus, and we are going to send you on to San Antonio where they do have more room, where they do have the capability to take care of you.” So everybody was fine with that once you finally calmed them down and said, “Look you have a safe place now. You are going to be going to a safe place. . . . Just sit here and rest for a while, and then we will ask that you get back on the bus.” . . .

*We spent one hour one day talking about what we were going to call these individuals . . . On the television, you heard everything from “evacuees,” “refugees,” “Cajuns,” and more derogatory terms. The term we had in the Joint Incident Command was “guest citizens.” We wanted to show them and the community our respect. We . . . [told] the press, this is what we expect. . . .*

**Dr. Kenneth Mattox,**

*Professor and Vice Chairman of Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine,  
Chief of Staff at Ben Taub Hospital.*

I spent so much time out there, and I was right in the middle of everything. From the chaos at the very beginning, these people coming off of buses looking like they have been to hell. . . . Some of them had never even been out of New Orleans before; to give them a place to sleep and some food and a shower. We stopped calling them evacuees. . . . Someone started saying, “Well, the refugees are coming.” . . . They are not refugees. They are evacuees. Get it straight. Then after the first couple of days, they were our guests. . . . The only other city that had the number of evacuees [we had] was Baton Rouge. . . .

There was nothing that was so big it was overwhelming, you just [had] to get it done. In the beginning we were planning for fifteen minutes out. Then we started planning for thirty minutes, an hour out. Then we started planning for six hours out and then . . . we were able to look twenty-four, and then two days, and three days. In the beginning . . . I was on the floor of the Arena, and we started opening these big halls and just started throwing cots in them. I put a cot down, and I look five minutes later, and there is an evacuee sitting on it. . . . You could just see their faces, and what they have been through. They have been through days in the Superdome. They just spent twelve hours on a bus. They just sat outside the Astrodome because . . . they went through a processing area when they were checked for their medical needs, this, that, and the other, and they were wiped out. Just to be able to come face to face and say, “Hey welcome to Houston. This ain’t much, but it’s a cot; and we’ll get you some food and take care of you.”

You didn’t have any downtime. It was almost a month, I’d have three hours sleep, four hours sleep, five hours sleep, but it

was basically eighteen hour days. . . . I didn't see this office for a month. . . . I would drive around and go from shelter to shelter. I was up for thirty-six hours straight during the first three days. Then I was ordered to go get some sleep. . . . I wasn't the only one. . . . We had to tell other people, "You're going home." Everybody looked after each other.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE EFFORT

I was not part of the unified command structure; I was more of a representative of the mayor out of the unified command. The unified command only covered the Astrodome and the Reliant Center.

When I am the chief of staff to the mayor, I am an extension of the mayor. When I am seeing things that are needed, or that something is not getting done, it is my job to either make sure it gets done or to notify the mayor and come up with a solution to make sure it gets done. There are resources that were needed out at the Reliant Center or the George R. Brown. [It was] communicating to the mayor and helping people solve those problems.



*The ability of Mayor Bill White and Judge Robert Eckles to work as a team was critical to the success of Houston's response. Shown left to right, Mayor White, attorney Lynden Rose, Judge Eckles, and Railroad Commissioner Michael Moore.*

I advanced two presidential campaigns. Advance is when you go in and set up a presidential event; you have seven days to set an event up. So I have done [advance] both for candidates and the president and vice-president [in which] you deal with a lot of different situations and people. You have a very short period of time to muster the resources, the people, and deal with secret service, local police, and local elected officials, so I did have that training. . . . When you show up at a city, and you are going to organize a rally for 40,000 or 60,000 people, and you are going to bring a presidential candidate with them, or the president or the vice president, . . . it's a pretty big deal. . . . That training really helped me out here.

It was amazing how the judge [Eckles] and the mayor [White] worked as a team. Hats go off to those guys, . . . You've got two different guys that put all egos aside and said, "We've got something big to solve," . . . and they worked as a team. One would go to one meeting, and one would cover another. It was really neat to see. . . . They knew each other, . . . but they really got to know each other through this. [They] got to know intricate little things about each other and how they work, and

. . . they both deserve credit. . . . We [were] . . . all in this together, so when the judge would ask me to do something, it would be like the mayor telling or asking me to do something. . . . We were all working towards the same end. I tried to help him out, and he tried to help me out. It was just a great working relationship.

The daily briefings happened out at the Astrodome and at the George R. Brown. They were two different things. The unified command . . . was a twenty-four hour operation. You would have a morning briefing when you were changing hands, the night shift leaving and the day shift coming on, and again in the evening. Then you have a mid-day report and an end of the evening report on what [went] on during the day and what we [were] doing.

You had the virtual organization that the mayor and the judge set up [to solve problems]. That was at the George R. Brown at 8:00 every morning. It had elected officials, the non-profit groups, the faith-based groups, members of the shelter command. It had a number of the faith-based shelters, Red Cross, United Way, everybody was there. It also had private companies, corporations. Wal-Mart was there. Center Point Energy was there. I'll tell you Center Point gave us a lot of volunteers that were in a lot of key positions that really helped us out.

The first thing we would do is get updates as to what's going on; how many shelter's we've got, the number of people there, what their needs [were]. We started doing intelligence to go out and find out where the other evacuees were. We found out there was a big group in Hong Kong Mall, the Vietnamese community. We started hearing about the Hispanic group, . . . about certain churches calling other churches and taking in congregations from New Orleans, . . . about the hotels being full and people running out of money. . . . [At the meetings] you brought a problem, you had a status report from the shelters, . . . who could solve the problem, . . . and then we would go onto the next problem, . . . [and] identify what we needed to do the next day. . . . It would usually last an hour to an hour and a half. . . . The mayor and the judge ran it like clockwork. If you tried to . . . give a speech, you were shut down immediately and told, "We are here to solve problems." It helped bring everything together, and we were solving this thing as a community. . . . The virtual organization and that 8:00 meeting at the George R. Brown . . . really helped organize the community.

## CITY OF HOUSTON RESOURCES

When the phone [call came that] said, "We are going to take the people from the Superdome and put them in the Astrodome." Nobody realized, wait a minute, it's not working at the Superdome, how do you think it is going to work at the Astrodome? You can only put people where they can actually put a cot and have a place to stand. You can't put people in the seats. Luckily, Reliant Park had the Astrodome, Reliant Arena, and Reliant Center; so it had the capacity. But at first, the fire marshals went into the Astrodome and said, I think, it was 8,000 maximum. That wasn't enough room. . . . The mayor actually overruled the fire marshal—the only person that can overrule the fire marshal. . . . We moved it to 12,000 so we could actually use the concourses for people to sleep on. Then we started moving to the Arena and, then, to Reliant Center after that. You just can't take 25,000 or 30,000 people and put them in the Astrodome; it doesn't work. . . . We needed more large shelter space. So, . . . the decision was made to open up the George R. Brown.



Moore worked with various departments of the City of Houston to mobilize the resources needed by the evacuees. After hearing of a small outbreak of the Norwalk virus at the Dome, he responded aggressively.

I called the mayor and said one of the things [with] Norwalk is [that] people have to wash their hands. People have to get clean. The Astrodome, Reliant Center, and George R. Brown are set up for a three-hour football game . . . [not] for somebody to live there twenty-four hours . . . and neither is the staffing to clean it. . . . We called Building Services for the City of Houston and said, “Get every available janitor you can get that works for the city and have them start doing that, and let’s call the county, and let’s start rotating shifts to keep those places clean to stop the spread of the Norwalk virus.” All of a sudden we started seeing all the City of Houston janitors showing up at the Astrodome, going through and cleaning restrooms and the facilities. At the same time, the hospital folks were handing out hand disinfectant. Those people that went out to stop the spread of that [virus], . . . those are my heroes. . . . I knew that we had over 20,000 [employees], we have basically an army . . . from police, fire, janitors, parks department, everything, public works. . . . You have to use those resources, and you have to use them in a wise way. That was just one example of seeing a problem, calling the mayor, telling him about the problem, and he said, “Do it, make it happen.” So we made it happen.

The mayor is in charge of the City of Houston—very strong mayoral form of government. City Council gets spending authority, . . . but the mayor is the one that marshals the groups in the city. So when he says, “go do something,” we had building services out helping the shelters, whatever they needed. We had folks building showers at the George R. Brown. We had parks department helping clean the exterior of the Reliant Center because if you keep the place clean, everybody will be calmed down. We had folks from parks department helping set up outside activities at the Reliant Center [and George R. Brown] . . . for the school age kids. . . . We used all the resources we had, and the expertise we had, where we needed it.

One of the coolest things . . . we did early on . . . [was] set up daycare. If you gave the kids something to do, . . . where the kids could go and play and forget their problems for a while and let the parents figure out . . . “Okay, let me try and find my cousin. Let me try and find my uncle. Let me go stand in the FEMA line for hours and deal with this.” [To] know that their kids are taken care of and, at the end of the day, know that they are happy, it helped settle things down.

Immediately they started organizing those kids going to schools. At one point in time we had over 25,000 kids in the local schools. That’s not easy. . . . I know Jesuit High School ended up holding the Katrina classes at night for the Jesuit High School in New Orleans and the regular school during the day. HISD did a great job. . . . You have to find teachers . . . It’s a lot of classes.



*By utilizing the city’s resources, the response team provided a daycare center with a playground. This enabled parents to have time to deal with administrative needs while giving the children a chance to play and, in turn, calm down.*

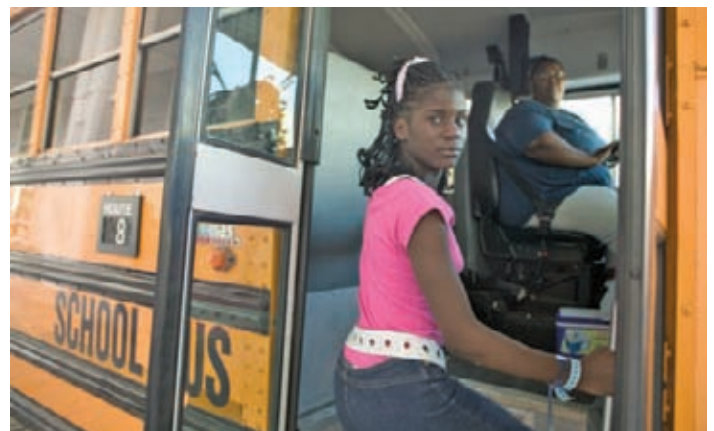
## VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers did a lot of the work. We couldn’t have done it without volunteers. . . .

The Red Cross is in charge of actually putting together shelters. They have cots stored around the country. They didn’t have this many cots. . . . We still had people coming in, and we still didn’t have enough cots for the George R. Brown and other facilities. The Red Cross put a call out to fly in more cots. I don’t know where they flew in from. . . . They said, “The cots are being unloaded off an airplane at Intercontinental Airport.”

So I pick up the phone and . . . I said, “I need a police escort for these.” I think this is the first police escort of a truck full of cots in history. . . .

The Red Cross [was] stretched to the limit and they didn’t have enough resources because they were covering the whole Gulf Coast. They . . . did a tremendous job, and they are better because of this. . . .



*Getting the children in school was a major concern for responders. HISD schools took in over 25,000 students from New Orleans.*





figure out how to get the hot water. . . . It is finding the right plumber engineer [to] sit there and think outside the box, and go, “OK, I can set up fifteen right here.” We’ll put curtains around it and divide it. . . . At the George R. Brown they put washing machines that weren’t there before. We had to build a small city for a short period of time. It was a community; there were people that came out of the woodwork.

Imagine taking yourself with nothing except a small bag and go to another city, and you have nothing else. You haven’t showered for days; you haven’t eaten right for days. It is the little things. . . . We had local barbers and hair dressers come out there and set up shop just to give people haircuts . . . It does such wonderful [things] for the psyche. People would just go up there and set up shop and give [their services] for free. . . . The community really came out.

*The organizers of the relief effort could not have accomplished what they did without the help of over 43,000 volunteers.*

We had the Mexican Red Cross come in, and they were really helpful. . . . There were a significant number of Hispanic evacuees; but they didn’t go to the Astrodome. . . . We had this great group of fire fighters from Mexico. . . . Councilman [Adrian] Garcia actually put them to work. There was another group, . . . a large population of Vietnamese outside of New Orleans that I think were in the fishing industry. . . . They went out to Hong Kong mall and other places in the Vietnamese community. There were thousands of them. We had to find people that could speak to them and tell them what we can do, where they can go for help. . . .

I got a phone call [from] Catholic Charities [that] had a line around the block, and they needed some HPD help. . . . One small church might have taken care of twenty people and another one might have taken care of 400. . . . People came in and grabbed small families and said, “I have a garage apartment. Come off the floor and stay in my garage apartment.” There were churches that came and pulled bus loads of people and took them to their church.

Eisenhower said something one time, you can plan, and plan, and plan—and planning is a good thing—but once something happens, you throw the plan out the window. . . . You just need to know your resources. Luckily, I was in a position to know the resources at hand for the City of Houston and be able to help the mayor and the city in that situation. . . . I’ll give you an example. . . . We needed someone to come over and start building showers . . . because people had to take showers. . . . There are drains and pipes, and you have to

*Red Cross volunteers came from Mexico to assist with Hispanic evacuees. Shown here with Dr. Persse (left) at St. Agnes Baptist Church.*

*Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.*

## HOUSING

Then you have the Joint Katrina Housing Task Force, which ended up taking everybody out of the shelters and putting them into apartments. We had around 40,000 apartment units that people who had vouchers were put in. That is 40,000 units multiplied by three point something [people]. That is over 120,000 put in these apartment units. You only had 25,000 to 29,000 in these mass shelters. Think about everybody else that was here. Those are the people that needed the vouchers. There are a lot of other people that didn’t need the vouchers that had a company that helped them out, or had their own savings, or got help from faith-based organizations. . . . So when people concentrate . . . [on] the Astrodome and the George R. Brown, well, a lot of things were going on outside.







Local hair stylists and barbers came to the shelters to offer their services to Houston's "guest citizens" free of charge.

Guy Larkin . . . is with the Harris County Housing Authority. Their next step was getting the people out of the mass shelters and putting them in apartments. The first [groups placed were] seniors, disabled, and then mothers with young kids. . . . I followed the second [bus] . . . from the Astrodome out to a place

off of Airline and I-45. . . . Almost everybody on there was a disabled senior, and that is what this place was for. . . . They walked [in] like they were in heaven. . . . They said, "So what are we here for a week?" . . . They asked us three times. "No you are here for a while." . . .


[One of the women said,] "I've never had a dishwasher, ever in my place." That is all she could talk about was having a dishwasher. . . . To see that on their faces . . . a lot of them are still there today. . . .

## HOUSTON

We are not [just] the fourth largest city, I think we are a community. . . . We are a working city; we come here to work. You come here for a city of opportunity, but if somebody is in need, Houstonians are there. Nothing is too big for Houstonians or Texans. When this challenge came in, it was all hands in. . . .

The people that were trying to rescue New Orleans and Mississippi, those people were really on the front lines. We were on the front

lines here, but we were receiving. We had all of our infrastructure in place. We had all the assets of the fourth largest city in the United States. We had two great leaders leading us, the judge and the mayor. We just had a lot of work ahead of us . . .

You really cannot plan for something like this. On being a receiver city for evacuees or being a city that evacuates, we are the most prepared city in the United States, and it is because we have done it. 

## Leasa Sullivan: Thoughts on Apartment Housing


Leasa Sullivan, a property manager in Conroe, Texas, for ten years, shared her experiences during Katrina in correspondence with *Houston History* on June 8, 2010.

Within three days of the hurricane, buses began arriving at our apartment community to drop off evacuees who came from the Astrodome. FEMA had announced that they would pay for a hotel/motel room or an apartment to help those who qualified for assistance. FEMA required the evacuees to apply online using their actual address in Louisiana, and about 95% of applicants with a verifiable address received approval. We kept a running spreadsheet of the evacuees' names and FEMA numbers to turn into FEMA for reimbursement. One snag was the inability to run a criminal background check since all systems were down in Louisiana.

At one point, I had about thirty evacuees in my office who were distressed and not sure what to do. It was very difficult to see, and to imagine, what they were going through. We tried to make them as relaxed as possible and reassure them that they would have a place to stay. Our property in Conroe housed over 100 evacuees and their families, which ranged from single families to extended families living with further extended families.

We knew the evacuees had basically lost everything

including clothes, housewares, furniture, etc. The first night, I was able to purchase towels, basic toiletries, pillows, and blankets for six families to make it through the night. By the time the buses started arriving the next day, several local residents had contacted me to make donations, including a house full of furniture, clothes, car seats, cribs, money, and much more—all donated by local Conroe residents. We had such a huge outpouring of people wanting to help that we started a donation center in the clubroom at the apartment community. The main area contained clothing and food, one office had kitchenware, another office had bedding, and the list went on. The local Jack in the Box restaurant, which was remodeling, brought over all of its old tables and chairs for some of the evacuees.

I organized a crew from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to help with cleaning, painting, and basic make readies for the apartments. The church members donated two weekends of their time and ended up turning approximately seventy-five units so that the evacuees could move in as soon as possible. Additionally, one person from the church worked the donation center every day making sure that the new residents could find what they needed. It was amazing to see the small city of Conroe come together to help people in this way. 

# Mark Sloan:

## “The Voice Of Calm,” Coordinating Volunteers

At the time of Katrina, Mark Sloan worked for Harris County Judge Robert Eckels in Homeland Security Special Projects. Eckels spearheaded the Citizens Corps Initiative, which included the thirty-four jurisdictions within Harris County, all local law enforcement agencies, fire departments, EMS, as well as members of nonprofit agencies, faith-based community, and business partners, to ensure better planning, preparation, and response to disasters. As a result of this working relationship, Mark Sloan assumed responsibility for coordinating the mass of volunteers who made the Katrina relief effort possible. Ernesto Valdés interviewed Sloan on August 14, 2006.



*A volunteer helps distribute supplies for babies.*

*All photos courtesy of Mark Sloan.*

**MARK SLOAN (MS):** I don't think that a plan existed to utilize 60,000 volunteers, to build a mega-shelter the size of Katrina Relief—as we called it, Reliant City—and do that in a very short period of time. . . .

We found out during Katrina that, with over 100 agencies, there wasn't one nonprofit agency that could coordinate the size and the scope of that disaster. . . . That is when the judge tapped the Harris County Citizen Corps to take over the volunteer coordination for the entire operation at the Astrodome. . . .

**ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV):** When you realized that you had this obligation, what was your priority?

**MS:** Looking for help. . . . I actually received a phone call after being at the Dome for about thirty hours . . . and found out that the entire volunteer coordinating effort was going to be transferred over to the Citizen Corps. . . . When we put the request out for volunteers [through an email] to find out how many could help, in the first twenty-four hours, over 8,000 volunteers showed up. . . . I put a command structure in place with specific tasks and obligations . . . so that we could run it like a business,





*Two volunteers work together to set up cots in anticipation of receiving thousands of Katrina evacuees.*

take orders, and distribute our supplies and our resources, which were the volunteers. . . . After [about] the first six hours, we were able to have a process in place and work pretty efficiently. . . .

I was able to tap into our pre-trained community emergency response team members to fill specific roles, and volunteers that came in from other parts of the country filled specific needs and roles within our organization. We had Volunteer Houston coordinating all company business and group volunteers. For instance, Shell Oil called and said, “We would like to send over fifty volunteers every three hours.”. . .

We had six to eight individuals, volunteers that coordinated the volunteer check-in location [and] . . . monitored the elevators, escalators, . . . [and] parking lot [to direct other volunteers]. We had volunteer coordinators at the faith-based table so, if they were sent to the Salvation Army, they could be processed . . . to get access to the floor. . . .

We tried to establish a schedule so that everybody could have eight hours to go and decompress, relax. We had on-site facilities to sleep at Reliant—a dark room with probably thirty to forty cots—so you could go in there and sleep if you needed to . . . For a lot of us, the daily activities didn’t change. We still went to work, we still went to school, and our community still functioned . . .

[We] let everyone that was working with us, either as a volunteer or as an employee of an agency or jurisdiction, know that failure wasn’t an option; success was what we were going to do. . . .

One message I got from the judge’s office, and I don’t know if it came from the judge directly: “Just be the voice of calm.” . . . The perception that we gave off to the volunteers was that everything is running smoothly and fine. What we wanted to do was to change the image of the negativity that was actually out in the public about Katrina, [to] let them know what was going on, and that we can make a difference.

That is something that the judge has stressed all along. This is not about one group, one agency: it is a partnership. . . .

In retrospect, when you sit back and actually watch what occurred in twenty-four hours, it is mind boggling—the coordina-



*A Red Cross worker spends time on the Dome floor. The volunteers helped with basic necessities, but most importantly, created an atmosphere of hope.*

tion, the building of a city with all of the things that needed to be in place, and have those resources and people available, is amazing . . .

**EV:** What was your typical day like?

**MS:** I would usually be there at 4:00 a.m., park, and it could be a variety of different things.

During the day, we would have three incident command briefings—8:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m., and 8:00 p.m.

After those meetings, I would go down to the volunteer unit, find out the current status, follow up on current volunteer needs. I would be able to talk to the different agencies on what they anticipated in volunteers. It might be ARAMARK, our food service provider, where on the first few days, they needed 500 volunteers to man the food distribution areas. . . . We would work with the JIC [Joint Information Center] in terms of any celebrities that might be coming . . . So, the days would change.

**EV:** Did you keep your own personal diary?

**MS:** I wrote down notes of things that I want to remember to do and change if we ever did this again. . . . I’d jot a note: remember that if you send an email and ask for something, that you need to make sure that you are prepared to get what you ask for. . . . We decided [to] ask the Citizen Corps how many volunteers would be available because, again, everybody was still . . . doing their thing. I sent out an email, “Can you help? . . .” I received 1,000 emails an hour saying, “Yes, we will”; and it was . . . forwarded to thousands more. It took out my email system . . . So, the first lesson learned—you get what you ask for. Be more specific in things you want. . . .

The most significant thing—what made this different or greater than any aspect of our response—was [being] a prepared community. When I was at a briefing on Capitol Hill, . . . one of the individuals in the Department of Homeland Security, who happened to be in Europe during the event, couldn’t believe the negative response that he was seeing globally to New Orleans and the things that were going on [there]. He basically came back and said that the activities that took place in Houston changed the view of America globally. 🐉



# REV. ERIC HYSTAD: Operation Compassion at the George R. Brown



*Thousands of people came to the George R. Brown Convention Center to assist in feeding the many evacuees.*

*Photo by Diana Rodriguez.*

Reverend J. Eric Hystad joined the staff at Houston's Second Baptist Church in 1999. Having worked in pastoral education, he transitioned to working in new campus pastor development in the Houston area. After Hurricane Katrina, he was called upon to head up the effort to feed evacuees at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Ernesto Valdés interviewed Rev. Hystad on August 3, 2006.

**J. ERIC HYSTAD (JEH):** We knew what was going on with New Orleans, and we knew the tragedy that had happened there. We also knew that as a church, we were going to respond in some way . . . One of our pastors stopped by my office and . . . said, "Hey, we are going to recommend that you be in charge of this deal." At that point, I really wasn't sure what that "deal" was . . .

About one hour later . . . one of our pastors . . . said, "Hey, you need to get down to the Astrodome with one of our other staff members [Pastor Jerry Town] and find out what in the world is going on." . . . The information we had was that [the evacuees] . . . might be pulling up in big buses any moment. . . . We were surprised that nobody was out there to stop us. We pulled right up to the front door of the Astrodome, walked in, looked around

for people, [and] didn't see anybody. There was one table on the floor of the Astrodome, two guys eating lunch at noon on the day that thousands of people were coming to the Astrodome. . . . We quickly realized, they didn't know what was going on. . . . We broke the news to the poor guys that were having lunch there that they would soon have another job, and they didn't believe us. . . . Obviously, there wasn't anything for us to do there, so we went to the Red Cross. . . .

It was a different story there. People were coming in, registering. Lots of people were donating supplies and all that in anticipation of the folks coming from New Orleans. . . . An idea kind of germinated. . . . The best thing we could do . . . was to find one niche, and try to fill that niche—to help provide food to



feed the people. . . . The Texas Baptist Men, which is an organization that helps in disasters across the world, . . . had feeding centers, these big trailers, and are capable of feeding 100,000 meals a day. . . .

All along, I was talking with the Texas Baptist Men . . . [We] went down to the George R. Brown, met with the command center team, . . . and we simply said, “. . . We can serve all the meals. . . . We have done it before. . . .” We also knew that there were three huge trucks coming into town that could help us do this along with twenty to twenty-five men. . . . These guys are all retired; they are all from the state of Texas. Some of these guys are old farm guys. They [are] oil guys. They are just tough as nails. They don’t talk, they just cook. . . . We went on a tour of the George R. Brown, into the belly of that place, and saw what they had to offer.

We said, “. . . Why can’t we use your facilities?” . . . They gave us everything, which allowed us then to free up the trailers [to] send those to Port Arthur and to other places. . . . Once we realized how many people were at the George R. Brown, . . . we realized what we would have to do to serve meals for one month. . . . That is when it got a little scary because we figured out we had to get between 20,000 and 40,000 volunteers to help us. . . .

The Southern Baptists in Texas are made up of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and . . . the Southern Baptist Texas Convention . . . Both of them have emergency feeding disaster relief teams. . . .

They supplied the manpower [to cook,] and . . . we supplied the volunteers. They provided us a menu for the first three days—how much flour, how many cans of green beans—and then we ordered that through Sysco Foods. Sysco was amazing. A lot of the companies we called immediately said, “You know, we can’t comp everything, but we’ll comp a whole bunch of this.” . . . They would give us everything they could. . . .

We started serving, on Friday, but the first few meals, actually, we bought meals for everybody because we didn’t have a place to cook. . . . We did Chick-fil-A sandwiches one day for 10,000 people . . . the Chick-fil-A folks and Jason’s Deli folks . . . gave us great rates, and they were able to pull it together.

**ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV):** How did the word go out to the different denominations?

**JEH:** We sent an email out . . . There were a bunch of phone calls made to denominational leaders in town, and they were asked to get the heads of churches to come, synagogues, mosques—every different kind of religious strike or bent was invited. One of the Christian radio stations [KSBJ] here in town made a series of announcements.

[At] that meeting . . . Dr. [Ed] Young . . . said, “Here is what has happened to our city. This is an opportunity for us as a body of faith-based believers of different groups, this is a chance for us to stand together, and to work together, and not worry about who gets the credit and not debate theological issues.” . . . He

*“Operation Compassion” volunteers help deaf evacuees of Hurricane Katrina.*

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.



introduced the title “Operation Compassion” and told them, “Our job is simple. We are going to provide food and meals for the people as well as gift bags that would have toiletries and different things.” Then, he challenged them to provide the finances to make it happen as well as volunteers. . . . There were probably 500 people [there] . . .

We laid out some dates for training. . . . Texas Baptist Men required . . . [us] to have volunteers that were trained. . . . We set up three meetings all here at our church. The first one was on a Sunday, and it basically filled up the 6,000 seat worship center. The next day . . . we filled up the worship center, the old sanctuary, and the chapel. The next training conference, we simply couldn’t hold everybody. . . . There were about 18,000 people. . . . We immediately scheduled an additional series of training sessions . . . at different churches . . . Over a span of about two weeks, we trained . . . [approximately] 43,000 people. . . .

These folks were not just ready, they were saying, “Can I work another shift?” . . . [We took] over the volunteer responsibilities throughout the George R. Brown. . . . In some cases, we’d have 1,000 people a shift. . . . We were doing food . . . [and] gift bags; we were helping with the beds; . . . people on every station . . . cleaning, phone banks; we had people there helping people with showers—for all twenty-four hour shifts. . . . On September 9th . . . we had 7,000, 8,000, 10,000 evacuees, and 1,000 [volunteers wearing] yellow shirts . . .

**EV:** What complaints did you hear?

**JEH:** The only complaints we heard were two. One was [from a gentleman who] didn’t want to do the training, and he still wanted to help. . . . The other concern was . . . [from] a gentleman that was . . . absolutely inflammatory. He felt like the faith-based organizations were taking over, that it was a power play. . . . We


## OPERATION COMPASSION

VOLUNTEERS TRAINED	43,523
MEALS SERVED	118,711
HYGIENE KITS PROVIDED	88,813

simply said, “Here is our mission.” There is no ulterior motive. . . . There are, best we have been told, 150,000 to 200,000 people that are now in our city that weren’t here over one week ago. Somebody has got to feed these people. Can you do it? . . . The bottom line is that we have people from every faith-based organization. . . . I mean, you name it, we had it. We bent over backwards to help people. The Muslims wanted to serve food on September 11, on 9/11, as a symbolic opportunity, . . . and we worked with them on that . . .

The fact [is] that in all of the time that we were there, nobody got sideways about doctrine, about theological beliefs. Nobody got in each other’s face about, my church is better than your church or bigger than your church. That was just a non-issue . . .

**EV:** What did you learn that may have surprised you about human nature?

**JEH:** The stuff that divides people so often simply went away. . . . We saw people let down their differences and let down their guards for a higher, more noble purpose. . . . We are all [usually] focused on doing our own thing. . . . Obviously, Katrina shattered that. You can’t do this unless you link arms together. The other thing is people, when you give them a task, they flat out can do it. . . . 

## Jennifer Poston: Reflections on the Interfaith Effort

Jennifer Poston is with Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston and manager of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Response. She was interviewed by Ernesto Valdés on August 17, 2006.

Probably the biggest mantra in the disaster world, if I can use that terminology, is not to proselytize. . . . This is not a Protestant thing, this is not a Catholic thing, this is not a Muslim relief thing, this is not about “I am going to give you bread, but I am going to tell you, you need to hear about Christ in addition . . . I’ll give you bread only if you also accept the Bible.” . . . Shared beliefs are what drive us to do things of good. In the Abrahamic faiths, we all are taught to clothe the naked, feed the hungry and welcome the stranger. So, in the Jewish tradition, in the Islamic tradition, and in the Christian tradition, that is not hard for people of that background to want to go out and do something . . . America is in a politically correct society that we know that we don’t proselytize when we are out doing this. It is the act of doing the good work that speaks for itself . . . Pastoral care is taught in what is called a

ministry of presence. You don’t have to talk about the New Testament to someone. You just need to listen . . .

We had trained . . . Adventists, Baha’is, Baptists, Buddhists, Catholics, Charismatics, Church of God, Disciples of Christ, Episcopalians, Hindus, Jains, Jehovah Witnesses, Jews, Lutherans, Mennonites, Methodists, Mormons, Muslims, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Quakers, Sikhs, Universal Unitarians. . . . 629 organizations represented . . .

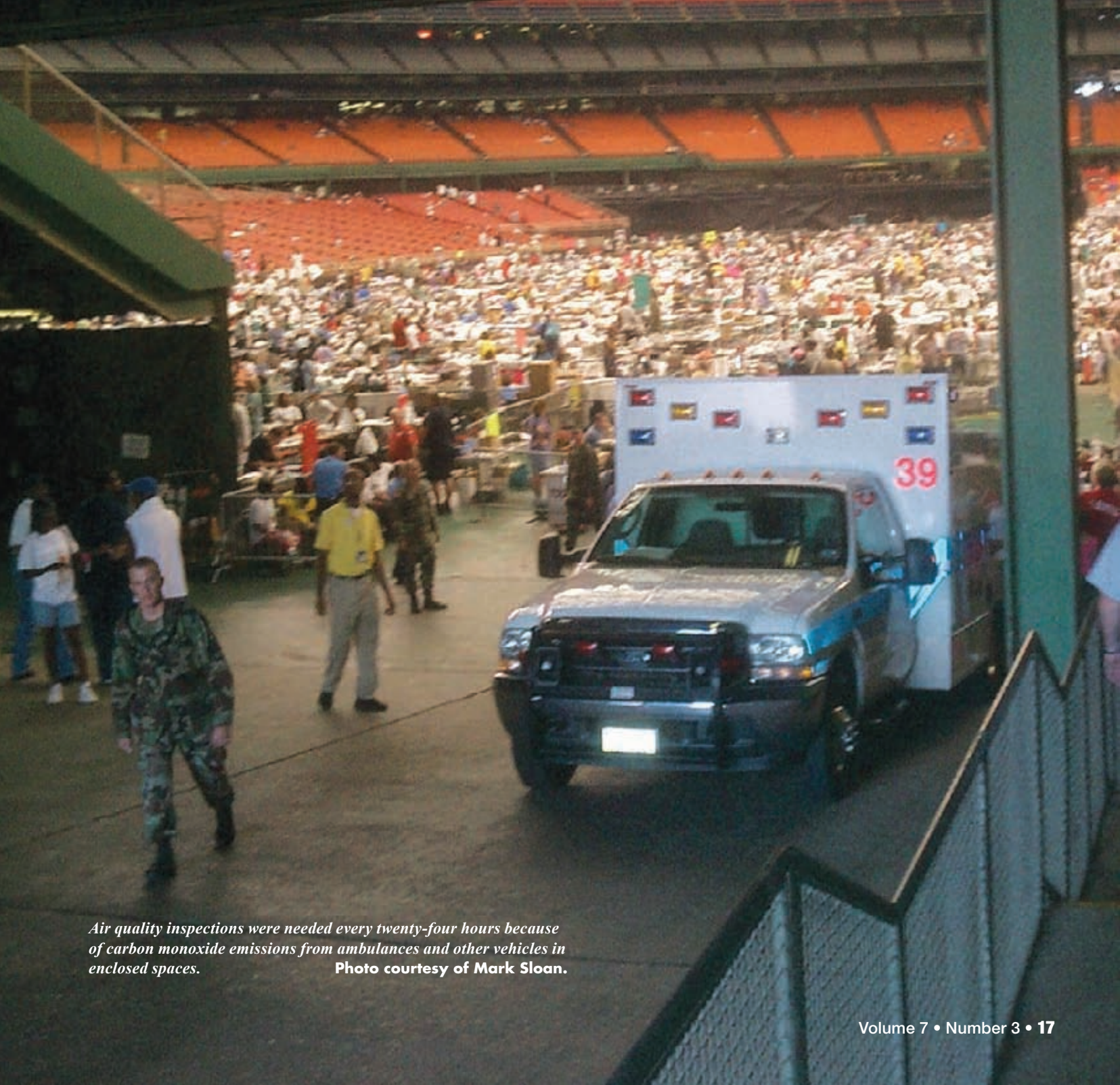
[At] the training at Second Baptist Church, when all those faith communities came together, you had Muslims sitting next to Baptists sitting next to Buddhists. People in prayer, praying in unison. Sure, we may not have said, “In Jesus’ name.” We just said, “Amen.” But it was sometimes 12,000 or 15,000 praying at one time. How amazing is that?



# Serving the Medical Needs of Houston's "Guest Citizens"

Conversations with Dr. Kenneth Mattox, David Lopez,  
Dr. David Persse, Diana Rodriguez, and Ernesto Valdés

Thousands of volunteers worked in patient care and behind the scenes to provide for the medical needs of the folks who sought refuge in Houston after Hurricane Katrina. These doctors and medical personnel shed light on a portion of that story.



*Air quality inspections were needed every twenty-four hours because of carbon monoxide emissions from ambulances and other vehicles in enclosed spaces.*

**Photo courtesy of Mark Sloan.**



## Dr. Kenneth Mattox: Organizing Medical Care at the Astrodome

Dr. Mattox served as co-director of the medical branch response to Hurricane Katrina along with Lieutenant Joe Leonard from the Coast Guard. Mattox is a professor and vice chairman of surgery at Baylor College of Medicine and chief of staff at Ben Taub General Hospital. He assisted in the development of the Emergency Medical Services of the Houston Fire Department ambulance service and is a member of the American College of Surgeons Trauma Network. He is the author/editor of *Trauma*, which includes a discussion of immediate response to disasters with regard to both injuries and infrastructure. Ernesto Valdés interviewed Dr. Mattox at his office on July 20, 2006.

**ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV):** In your research of disasters, did you build different models to respond to different types of events?

**KENNETH MATTOX (KM):** Yes, we have been involved in model development and scientific analysis. How many people are really hurt, and how many people die? Of those who don't die immediately, how many come to the hospital? For those that come to the hospital and are looked at, how many are really sick how many emergency rooms do we need, how many doctors do we need, how many operating rooms do we need? ... Do we really need radiation detection, do we really need a lot of caches of drugs and supplies? What do you need from a manpower and supply standpoint, from the medical standpoint, from the hospital standpoint, from the rescue standpoint to take care of a population? ...



*Dr. Mattox, right, and David Lopez worked tirelessly to ensure that the medical needs of the evacuees were taken care of as quickly as possible.*  
Photo courtesy of David Lopez.

It is *extremely* consistent. For instance, with any disaster, there are going to be people who die immediately. ... Those people that are alive after the initial event, only ten percent will need to seek out health care; and of those who come to

a hospital emergency room, even though a lot may look bad, only ten percent have life-threatening injuries. ... If you get a population, you know how many people are going to have diabetes, cancer, what kind of cancer they are going to have, what percentage have heart disease, hypertension, [and] asthma. Those figures are well known.

**EV:** How was that knowledge applied in your preparations in the short time you had to get ready for this event?

**KM:** I was in communication with people in New Orleans ... about what was happening ... How many people are evacuating? ... What kinds of patients are they seeing? ... They were seeing dehydration ... people who had lost their prescriptions. They weren't seeing many injuries. They didn't have any broken bones, but they had hypertension, diabetes, asthma, need for dialysis. ...

Then, at 6:00 a.m. on Wednesday morning, the 31st of August, I received a phone call that asked me to be ready for a conference call. ... Our objective was to take care of the health needs of these people. ... We constructed, in the next twelve hours, five different levels of care that we were going to provide. ... We had about 200 items we addressed very, very quickly. ...

We looked at each other, and we said, "We know each other. We are not going to accept 'I can't do it' as an answer while we are working on this. ... We are going to achieve this operation, and we are going to achieve it quickly, and accurately, and with great expertise. And if you can't do that, get out of the room, we will replace you with somebody else." ...

I have the ability to cut through a lot of red tape, and if I need pediatricians, geriatricians, [or] dialysis, I am able to request for volunteers to those organizations and get them almost instantaneously. ... There was a DMAT [Disaster Medical Assistance Team] cache in Galveston. Cache is a storage place; two caches with pharmacy stores for just this kind of activity. I said, "I want one of those caches here. I want to keep one down there in case there was a hurricane at Galveston two weeks later." ... That cache was never released ... because of some government quirk in the law. [Houston] had not been declared a disaster area, so they couldn't release the cache. We came over to Ben Taub, and we raided our pharmacy so we could open the clinic. Meanwhile, we called CVS and said, "Do you have an eighteen-wheeler that you have a bunch of drugs on that you can have out there in the morning?"

[They said,] "Yes," [and] we were able to replete our drugs. ... We decided very quickly we would have no pharmacy except for over-the-counter medicines in the Astrodome itself, and we would tightly control all medical care within the Arena. ...

We began that first day to encounter federal barriers because of red tape, regulations, and silos of thinking. Our job was to cut through those. ... We knew the first thing we were going to encounter were sick people that needed to go to the hospital because they hadn't been dialyzed for five days. We knew that people had lost their pills, and we needed some way to identify what they had been on and to refill their prescriptions. ...

We postulated that in four days, we were going to have a diarrhea epidemic, we were going to have maybe a pneumonia epidemic from colds, and maybe we were going to see increases in mental health problems. ... We set in place a surveillance mechanism to pick things up, and then ... keep it from spreading.





CVS was able to fill the void for medications when the cache of medicine and supplies in Galveston could not be released due to red tape.  
Photo courtesy of Mark Sloan.

We knew we had over 200 voluntary agencies, . . . so we formed this thirty member Joint Unified Command . . . [that] met every eight hours around the clock . . .

*Dr. Maddox was very good at doing, at the end of the day, a little “Mattox Minute” . . . basically, [a] caution that we needed to tend to ourselves. While I think we all understood that intellectually, nobody really had time to address those issues, and the Unified Command did an outstanding job of really trying to preserve morale. Part of it was just the privilege.*

**Dr. Herminia Palacio**, Executive Director,  
Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services.

**EV:** How did you all credential folks?

**KM:** The first twenty-four hours, anyone who is a member of

*Massive amounts of shoes and clothing were donated to the relief effort and then sorted by volunteers by gender and size. Upon arrival, this was the first stop for evacuees who did not need medical attention.*

Photo courtesy of Mark Sloan.



the Harris County Medical Society was automatically credentialed. . . . [We] took our credentialing people from this hospital and set up an office over there. We had about 4,000 physicians who volunteered . . . There were 200 . . . that we could never credential . . . We were protecting this innocent public, and we were one of the very few disasters . . . in [this] country that has done that. . . .

*I usually had a pedometer with me to check how many steps I took [at Reliant]. That first day, I think I walked 16,000 steps in twenty-four hours . . . about eight to nine miles.*

**Dr. Carlos Valbona**,  
Medical Director of Community Health Centers,  
Harris County Hospital District.

**EV:** How was the mental health of these folks?

**KM:** Probably twenty-five percent of the people of the population that we received already had mental health problems before Katrina . . . Four individuals who were part of the medical group were mental health [professionals] . . .

We created an atmosphere of hope over despair. . . . We had background noise and music in the Astrodome. We created a mechanism of signage where they could look for their relatives. We created an atmosphere of religion. . . . From the moment the buses rolled into the Reliant Park, we wanted to start on changing that despair. We had a medic, a nurse, a nurse practitioner, and in some cases, a doctor who would walk on every bus and would hand them a . . . registration [form], . . . a bottle of water, [and] a sanitation kit that contained soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, a razor, and shaving cream. . . . They said, “We want you to exit the bus, and if you are really bad sick, we’re going to the hospital. If you . . . need a prescription refill, we will do that four hours from now or in the morning. What we want you to do is go to this room where there are piles of clothes that were donated, . . . pick you out some new clean clothes, shoes, and underwear.”

One of the things we barked in the morning was we want 400 showers. How they got there, I don’t know, but they were there.



New piping was brought in; new drainage was brought in. “We want you to go take a shower, throw your old clothes away, put on your new clothes, and go to this location where there is a hot meal. [Then], . . . go to the floor of the Astrodome, and there is a cot and a blanket, and go to sleep.” That in and of itself is giving these people hope. . . . Initially as they got off the bus, they would hoard the food. By thirty-six hours, they stopped hoarding the food because they knew we were going to keep the food rolling and the water running. . . .



*The City of Houston successfully installed showers, washing machines, and sinks in order to ensure sanitation in the shelters.*

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.

From a historic perspective, what Houston did to come together in an integrated, collaborative network, to work together to rescue a community that was in despair was absolutely incredible, and I don’t think [it] could have happened in any other community in the United States. It was partly brought about by the attitude of the mayor, and the county judge, and this unified command; for we had an expectation of treating people with dignity. . . . We wanted to show them [our “guest citizens”] and the community our respect. We did not lock them in. This was not a prison; this was a shelter. This was a conduit for them to become productive members of society, and we tried to communicate that to them. The [Houston] community did that together, and there were over 60,000 volunteers that participated in that.

## David Lopez: “Working in public health . . . feeds your soul”

David Lopez is the president and chief operating officer for the Harris County Hospital District. The county’s public health care system provides many services including over one million patient visits annually. The district operates Ben Taub, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Quentin Mease Hospitals, fourteen community health care centers, nine school-based clinics, as well as homeless shelters and mobile health care units. The county primarily coordinated the medical facilities set up at the Astrodome during Katrina. Lopez was interviewed at his office by Ernesto Valdés on January 27, 2010.

**ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV):** What did you do when you heard that people were evacuating to Houston?

**DAVID LOPEZ (DL):** I contacted my staff, “We are going into disaster mode.” (Not internal disaster but external disaster; internal disaster if it happens inside the hospital.)

We worked with both UT and Baylor; UT was staffing the George R. Brown, Baylor was staffing, . . . the Katrina facility we set up [at the Astrodome.] . . . It was basically a large MASH unit. . . . We had portable x-rays, we had laboratory people there, . . . we had whatever we needed. It was really an awesome thing to see. . . .

**EV:** Did Tropical Storm Allison prepare you for Katrina?

**DL:** Absolutely . . . What we learned from Allison is that we can improvise, and in working as a team, we can work together in a positive environment. . . . When Katrina hit, we had learned from that experience. . . . Regardless of what you face, . . . you take it, you address it, you analyze it, and you figure out a plan . . . Once you develop a template for what works, then you use it. When we had the hurricane [Ike], we set up a command center, and whatever we had learned from Allison and Katrina,



*The Katrina facility that was set up at the Astrodome was basically a large MASH unit. Portable X-rays, labs, and basic medical equipment such as blood pressure machines were all on site.*

Photo courtesy of Mark Sloan.



in our drills, we handled extremely well. . . .

The first bus that showed up [from New Orleans] was so unexpected. We were told we were going to get the first bus the next morning, but a bus showed up all by itself eight hours ahead of time . . . So you have to improvise and say, “Alright, we’ve got to take care of them . . .” We got a handle on it, and we were managing it as opposed to reacting. That is a stage you want to get to. . . .

**EV:** What were some of the public health issues that you faced?

**DL:** As people were getting out of the buses, some didn’t make it; so you had to remove them with dignity.

**EV:** People passed away on the buses?

**DL:** Yes.

**EV:** Oh my.

**DL:** We never talked about those things, but you had to remove them out of the buses with dignity. That became important. . . .

We had, the first night, a lot of the people on the bus who hadn’t had their methadone treatments. . . . They were kind of hyper. . . . We actually called the HPD, and we said, “. . . We want the biggest, burliest police officers you’ve got, and we are going to form a barrier between them and our staff to have security in a nice, professional cordial way.” They showed up, and they formed a line . . . and said, “Stay back. They will get to you, wait your turn.” To their credit, people would wait their turn. . . .

*[Around] two o’clock in the morning, I had . . . close to 2,000 . . . waiting to be seen by a physician. . . . I told [David Lopez], . . . “The physicians are almost idle because we have to register these people . . . may I go ahead and see the patients, and . . . get [the] registration [afterwards]?” He said, “Do whatever you have to do.”*

**Dr. Carlos Valbona**, Medical Director of  
Community Health Centers, Harris County Hospital District.

One particular day, we had a patient, a kid who had something contagious, . . . and Dr. Palacio wanted him quarantined. The kid wanted to get back to his family, so he ran and tried to run back to the Astrodome. . . . I have a vision of Dr. Palacio running after him trying to chase him down, and she can move!

*Approximately thirty workstations were set up to check in individuals seeking medical attention.*

Photo courtesy of David Lopez.



*In order to stop the spread of diarrhea and infections, fifteen sinks were installed with great improvisation—something characteristic of Houston’s overall response.*  
Photo courtesy of David Lopez.

. . . We eventually found him. We didn’t want him infecting the rest of the population because if you have diarrhea affecting 20,000 people at the same time, that’s not good. . . .

People would say, “I have this problem; we have to worry about infection.” . . . This guy [replied], “We can set up ten, fifteen sinks here.” [But] we can’t touch the ceiling . . . [So] our maintenance guys . . . set up a whole string of sinks, fifteen sinks, with PVC pipe [and] faucets where you turn them on with your knees. I was so proud of my staff because they improvised, and they were coming up with great solutions. . . .

We said [to a government man], “Go find us bathrooms. . . . Do whatever you’ve got to do.” He got us fifteen bathrooms that we needed . . . portable potties. Everybody wants to participate and do whatever they can. In that kind of environment you don’t get, “That’s not my job.” . . . It is like when you have a football team. If the head back fumbles, the lineman isn’t going to say, “It’s not my job to carry the ball.” Everybody jumps at the ball. . . .

When you get involved in public health, public health is intoxicating, and it is also very addictive. Because working in public health like that, it feeds your soul. . . .

**EV:** Someone told me, “I never wanted to go home, and when I did, I couldn’t wait to get back.”

**DL:** I had to literally chase people home. They didn’t want to leave. You get hooked on adrenalin and endorphins. When you are doing something for others . . . it is ministry work. . . . You don’t worry about how much money you are getting paid; you don’t worry about the overtime. You know what you do? More people need help, and I’ve got to take care of them.

We thought we were going to have to keep it [the Astrodome clinic] open for at least a month, . . . but after we got everybody stabilized and took care of the basics, then we figured, at some point, we had to call it a day. It was really kind of sad. . . . We responded to a huge need, and we had provided outstanding patient care. . . . The ones who made it to the Superdome were

people who couldn't leave for whatever reason. They were the disenfranchised, the poor people. A lot of these patients had never seen a doctor before. . . . It provided us an opportunity to be of service to them in a very positive way. It was kind of bittersweet. . . . We decided we wanted to finish on a high note . . . So, the last day we were there, free ice cream for everybody. If you participated, a volunteer, or did anything, then we gave everybody shirts, "I was a Katrina Volunteer."

## Dr. David Persse: "Welcome to Houston. We are going to take care of you."

Dr. David Persse has served as the Director of Emergency Medical Services for the City of Houston since 1996. In May 2004, the City Council appointed him Houston's Public Health Authority. In this role, he is responsible for the medical aspects of clinical care quality management, disease control, and public health preparedness. He is a member of the Board of Directors for the South East Texas Trauma Regional Advisory Council and the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians. The City of Houston primarily coordinated medical care provided at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Dr. Persse was interviewed by Ernesto Valdés on August 2, 2006.

**ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV):** How did you find out you would be working on the Katrina relief effort?

**DAVID PERSSE (DP):** I got a call around five o'clock in the morning from Dr. Herminia Palacio who is the Harris County Public Health officer. . . . Looking back, it was laughable what we thought we were going to need. . . . Fifty wheelchairs and a hundred stretchers, three security guards, one-half dozen ambulances, or whatever. Those numbers aren't exact, but it was something on that scale . . . We wound up needing 500 wheelchairs and 200 ambulances. . . . We thought we were only going to get the people from the [Super]dome in New Orleans and they [would] come in a very orderly fashion to the [Astro]dome. . . .

Some time around ten or eleven o'clock Tuesday night, the first bus showed up. It was driven by someone who wasn't a

bus driver. Some young twenty or twenty-two-year-old fellow, . . . got in the bus, and he loaded every poor soul he could find onto that bus to help them out and drove them to Houston. That was the beginning, and that night, the buses trickled in. None of them were from the [Super]dome. . . . The next morning, the rate quickened. The Houston Fire Department . . . got a call to 9-1-1 from the Astrodome. It was a report of a sick person. When the fire truck and the ambulance responded over there, and the captain on the engine company arrived on the scene, there were quite a number of buses. He realized that this was quickly developing into something. . . . Captain Trevino, who is now our assistant chief over at EMS, showed up, and he immediately declared a mass casualty event . . .

When I went over to the [Astro]dome for the first couple of days, one of the experiences that tickled me forever is that the buses were lined up . . . where people would disembark. The process was that a paramedic . . . would board the bus and [say,] . . . "Welcome to Houston. We are going to take care of you. . . . For those of you who are in need of immediate medical attention, please remain on the bus. We are going to get everyone off who can get off and get you into the Dome. There is water out here. There are toilets out here. You will then get processed, and we will get you inside the Dome. . . ." Then, a police officer would get on the bus, and he would say, "Before you are going to be allowed in the Dome, everybody needs to understand you will not be allowed in with any drugs, weapons, or alcohol."

*"Medical Branch was responsible for essentially setting up a public health department for a city that went from a population of 0 to 27,000 in two days."*

**Dr. Herminia Palacio**, *Executive Director, Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services.*

My experience, standing up at the front of the bus, . . . was that as the fire fighters said, "Welcome to Houston. We are going to take care of you," the looks on the people's faces changed a little bit. . . . They almost went from awestruck with a little bit of anticipation to a little bit of relief. . . . When the police officer said, "You won't be allowed in with any drugs, weapons, or alcohol." People immediately presented drugs, weapons, and alcohol. . . . To see someone just hand over a handgun . . . just, here, take my handgun, just get me off this bus. I think that is a pretty loud statement of how anxious they were to get off the bus. Then, these people would file off the bus.

You have to understand, . . . they have been sweating, . . . the bus reeked because some of the buses had toilets and bathrooms on them that had all overflowed. The school buses, of course, didn't have that, and they didn't have air-conditioning either. The smell of just the human element—very strong smell. People looked completely exhausted. Emotionally devastated was the look on their faces. There were elder folks that looked very frail, and you wonder how they ever made it this far, they look so weak. Women with children and babies. Young, strong, men—gang member types—who look exhausted. Every slice of life, every strata of the community was on there. . . .

**EV:** What was your life like day-to-day?

**DP:** I woke up at 6:00 a.m. Sometimes I slept at the George R.



Dr. David Persse (center), Director of Emergency Medical Services for the City of Houston, coordinated medical care at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.





*Elderly evacuees were cared for in a hanger at Ellington Air Force base that they shared with a NASA plane.*

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.

Brown. Sometimes I slept at the Houston Emergency Center, emergency operation center. I think I went for three weeks without sleeping at home. . . . We set up a lot of processes to solve problems and then . . . we ran into the outbreak of Norovirus that occurred in the Dome and Reliant Center. Norovirus has become famous on cruise ships—nausea, vomiting, diarrhea. You put a lot of people together in tight quarters like that, it is an extremely contagious virus. . . . We had to quickly react . . .

General George Patton was absolutely right when he said, “The plan is nothing. The planning is everything.” . . . We put together these plans, and you’d drill on them, and you’d try to think things through. The problem is the disaster never reads the plan, so it never matches. . . . Your plan then becomes like a tool box with a variety of different tools in it, and you need to know it well enough that you can reach in and pull out the right tool, and use it the right way, to solve whatever problem you are faced with. . . . But if you don’t plan, you don’t get to know your tool box. . . .

**EV:** When did the planes start landing at Ellington Air Force Base?

**DP:** It was Wednesday evening . . . We would get a report that the planes were going to start arriving at 5:30 p.m. The local and EMS representative organization, the DeBakey VA Medical Center, [went] out there . . . 5:30 comes and goes, 6:30 comes and goes, 7:30 comes and goes, and there are no planes. We have got all these ambulances lined up, we’ve got doctors and nurses that were waiting. My phone rings . . . “Dr. Persse, this is Joe Smith of the Ellington air traffic control tower. There is a C130 inbound from New Orleans. I have no idea how many patients are on board, but they are landing in twenty minutes.” . . . A crew member would get off, and they would basically have a Big

Chief tablet of paper and handwritten on there was, “No. 1, Bob Smith; No. 2, Betty Smith; No. 3, . . .” and that was our manifest. It was pencil and paper. . . .

**EV:** Is it a surprise that there were no major injuries or illnesses because of the flood?

**DP:** Not really. People think that if you are walking through all that dirty water, that you are going to get sick. The reality is that you are at risk for contracting, certainly, tetanus, but we also worry about things like hepatitis. . . . But we did not see a big outbreak in hepatitis. I don’t know that we saw anybody with tetanus. . . . What we did see later on over the ensuing three months was the rate of sudden death in Houston jumped by over twenty-five percent. Our population went up by about ten percent, but the number of CPR cases per day went up by twenty-five percent. . . . We didn’t have a good way of saying that it was 100% folks from New Orleans, but that is the assumption. . . .

**EV:** What would you tell Houston right now?

**DP:** I think that Houston is better prepared for disasters of pretty much any kind—whether it is terrorists, otherwise man made, or natural, than most other metropolitan areas in the nation. Not because we are any smarter, or we’ve got any more dollars spent here, but because the people that are in decision-making positions here are probably more experienced than most other cities—New York City being an exception; Los Angeles maybe being another exception with all the ground fires and earthquakes. . . . Between Allison, Katrina, and Rita, your public health, your emergency services people here in the Houston area have a lot of experience, and experience is probably the best teacher.

## Diana Rodriguez: Emergency Care with a Photographer's Vision

Diana Rodriguez is the Administrative Coordinator to Dr. David Persse, the Director of the Houston Fire Department Emergency Medical Services. She is a trained EMT and has won a national award from the National Association of EMS Physicians for one of her EMS photographs. She observed the emotions that pervaded the various sites she visited both as a professional and a photographer. Ms. Rodriguez was interviewed at her office by Ernesto Valdés on August 16, 2006.

**ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV):** What were you doing when you heard that you would be doing something for Katrina relief?

**DIANA RODRIGUEZ (DR):** It was August 31, and that morning, Dr. Persse called me and said, "Get ready. When I swing by the office, I need to pick you up." We had done something very similar during Tropical Storm Allison when the hospital got set up over at Reliant Center. . . . During Allison we basically operated out of his car, and I had my box of index cards, my phone book—we were mobile nomads putting out spot fires and making sure things were running smoothly. . . . Dr. Persse told me, "We're going to be doing the same thing." I knew I was going to be very busy, and everything was going to be spontaneous. . . .

**EV:** Was your first assignment to meet the planes at Ellington Air Force Base?

**DR:** Yes. . . . We didn't know what to expect. . . . You only know what you've seen on TV at that point. . . . You are at Ellington. There is this big NASA plane in the background. . . . You are in a plane hangar, and you've got this little lady that is frail and that is getting attended to. It was just such a contrast of things and really, we didn't know what else was going to happen. Were there any more storms coming? Are we (Houston) going to get hit?

**EV:** When did you start snapping pictures of all this?

**DR:** Immediately . . . it was a given—I knew I had to have my camera. . . .

I asked this lady [at Reliant if I could take a picture of her



*A woman carried her niece's baby all the way from New Orleans after the family got separated.*

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.

baby] because I was trying to be considerate. . . . They had just gotten off a bus, and it was hot. She said, "Yes," and she held it up for me, and she smiled. I said, "Oh, thank you. . . . It is a precious little baby." She finally said, "It's not my baby . . . It's my niece's baby." I said, "Oh, O.K. Where is the mom?" Oh my God, that opened up the flood gates, and she said, "Well, I think she is here at the Astrodome, and we are going to try to find her." I said, "Well, we are about to . . . send you to the George R. Brown; so, don't go anywhere." . . . We got one of those little short Metro buses . . . to send them right down the street to the Astrodome. She said, "We got separated when the waters kept coming up . . . She hasn't seen the baby in two to three days." I would just be crazy if I was separated from my baby.

**EV:** So, did she finally find them?

**DR:** All I know is I put them on the bus. I've got a picture of them—they are on the bus, they are happy, and they are going to hopefully get reunited. I don't know what happened. That bothers me. I imagine they got reunited. I want to believe they got reunited.

**EV:** Did you notice a shift in attitude, a click from despair to hope?

**DR:** I think once we saw the people land, even at Ellington, it was, O.K., they're here—we can take care of them. . . .

As far as for the people that were coming in, I think they were just so relieved to get here and get off a bus when they had been on it for hours. I am thinking that that was their sense of hope. "There is hope. I am landing on the ground now, and it is not flooded. There is no mud. There is food." . . .

I know there were a lot of negative stories in the media. Most of these people were full of gratitude. Some even managed to smile. People would say to me, "Oh my God, you were dealing with those Katrina people. . . ." I never experienced anything negative—short of my flash went off one time when we were at the Dome, and one guy got really visibly upset . . . I kept running into people that if they knew you were with the fire department, . . . they would say, "Oh, thank you. Ya'll are so wonderful." . . . I felt like I didn't even do anything compared to some of our firefighters. 🍷



*Just before being taken to the George R. Brown, this family was moved to a special bus and taken to the Astrodome in hopes of being reunited with the baby's mother who they believed was there.*

Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.



# Claire Bassett: Incorporating Tulane Medical School with Baylor College of Medicine

Claire Bassett, Vice-President of Public Affairs at Baylor College of Medicine, oversaw the integration and transfer, in its entirety, of Tulane Medical School of New Orleans, which was flooded as a result of Katrina, to Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Ernesto Valdés interviewed Bassett, who has worked for the college for almost thirty years, on July 17, 2006.



*Match Day at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) for the Tulane fourth year medical students. The BCM students had their Match Day event in a separate location at BCM.* All photos courtesy of Claire Bassett.

**CLAIRE BASSETT (CB):** I was the first vice-president at the institution when we had [Tropical Storm] Allison hit. On that particular day, I walked in and someone said, “I think you are someone important?” and I said, “Maybe.”

He said, “Well, somebody important needs to know I just moved the cow into the ladies room.”

I said, “I qualify.” [laughter]

**ERNESTO VALDÉS (EV):** You really had a cow?

**CB:** Yes, we were evacuating our animal facility, which had water in it, and so one of our animal care providers had moved the cow up into the ladies room and was moving dogs into a conference room and pigs into a vacant office. . . . We were dealing with a lot of dead scientific animals trying to save the ones that we could. . . .

**EV:** Did that experience help you with this Katrina experience?

**CB:** It helped us a lot with understanding how to react in a crisis because Baylor was only closed about seven days when we had Tropical Storm Allison. We knew how to react in a crisis to get things up and running, even if they weren’t perfect. We knew that we had a lot to offer Tulane just in terms of how to work with FEMA, how to work with the National Institutes of Health, and how to deal with getting students back in line for classes. The UT Medical School had lost their entire anatomy lab in 2001 when Allison hit, and we took all of their first year medical students who needed to have access to an anatomy lab, and they were paired up with Baylor first year students so they actually shared a cadaver. . . . We knew that that could work for Tulane.

We started having faculty calling from Tulane asking could they help at the Katrina Clinic. . . . We started hearing from



*Tulane students worked in temporary offices at Baylor College of Medicine to assist the Tulane administration in preparing for the arrival of other Tulane students at BCM.*

Tulane students saying, “We are medical students—can we help?” Or from Tulane faculty members who said, “We are physicians. We have evacuated here. Is there something we can do?” . . .

The president got a call from one of our deans and said, “Do you think there is a way we could help the Tulane Medical School?” . . . I made several phone calls to track down some Tulane deans, and I found one of them that was actually staying at the Residents Inn. . . . I talked to Dr. [Marc] Kahn, [Dean of Admissions,] and I said, “This is who I am, and we want to see if there is a way we can help you on a transition because I can assure you, you are not going to be able to get back in your buildings immediately.” . . . We set a date for September 7, to have a combined meeting with leaders from Tulane as well as our academic leadership at Baylor.

Essentially, Tulane was trying to relocate all of their medical students and have them not lose one year of training because, unlike the undergraduate schools where you could transfer to another school and your credits would transfer, the way accreditation is set up for medical schools, you cannot do that because each medical school has a unique curriculum. If you transfer into one, just because you got the training in pediatrics at one place does not mean it is equivalent to how another medical school is set up. . . .

The good news was that the Tulane Medical School was very similar in size to Baylor. . . . Baylor would take all of the first and second year medical students, and that was a total of about 300 students. They would all be enrolled and have their classes, because in their first two years, they are sitting in classrooms and labs. . . . The third and fourth year medical students could be split up between the four medical schools and the different hospitals so that they could receive their [hospital] training where they are learning how to see patients, what to look for in a patient, with the supervision of physicians. . . .

We actually set up a temporary Tulane Medical School website where students could log in, . . . faculty could check in, . . . and they began to get a list of who was around and what they could do. We provided them temporary offices here so that they could start to get things put together, and . . . we agreed that we could make [an] auditorium available to Tulane for the entire year. . . .

Tulane, because we kept all of their first and second year

students at Baylor, were all going to receive their same education they would have received as though they were at Tulane because Tulane was able to bring in their faculty to teach the vast majority of their courses. . . . What you are giving them in their third and fourth years is the experience of patient interaction, the understanding of how physicians deal with patients, and you are giving them a little bit of freedom to do some things under a highly supervised model. So, it was fine for us to have our faculty supervising them, but again, there was a corresponding Tulane faculty member. A surgeon from Tulane was working with our surgery faculty assuring that what the students were learning met all of the criteria that they had. . . .

The one thing we did early on was we talked to the different accrediting agencies . . . because we had to also assure the accrediting bodies that in taking in an entire medical school, we weren’t going to do any kind of disservice to the integrity of the medical education for our students. To assure that, one of the things that we did was to actually launch a survey about four months into it where students could say, “This is a problem. This is working well.” . . . Interestingly, I would say ninety-five percent of the comments on the survey were, “This is great. I’d do it again. It has been a little inconvenient, but we have learned a lot by having them here.”

The things that were problems were parking, cafeteria time, and study hall space. . . . Both the faculty and the students from Baylor felt like having Tulane students here was an enhancement for what we did. . . .

**EV:** How did you do the matching for housing?

**CB:** We put out a call on our email listserv to people asking if they would be willing to host a medical student, and we had a tremendous outpouring of faculty, staff, and students who said, “Yes.” . . . We worked with realtors, . . . but we placed about half of the people who needed housing in donated housing because we didn’t know whether this was going to be a three-month, a six-month, or a nine-month commitment. Our leadership team at Baylor had a pretty good idea we were looking at a full academic year. . . . We probably found housing for about 200 of the students who had not already secured housing on their own. . . .

Some students had spouses, some had kids, and some had pets. We had one student whose wife was eight months pregnant, and she actually flew here, and we got an OB/GYN setup



*Tulane students were reunited when they attended a welcome session at BCM, marking their return to classes.*





*A Tulane student looks at medical textbooks donated by medical schools around the country in one of the BCM rooms designated for use by Tulane.*

for her. We actually matched her into a garage apartment situation with a pediatrician's family. . . . So, some of it was just me talking to people. There were people that had unique circumstances who said, "... it has to be someone that is comfortable with being with a couple who is gay." . . . It really was kind of a matchmaking service. . . .

**EV:** Did they do this out of their own pocket?

**CB:** Yes. What we had told Tulane was that we would not charge them for any kind of indirect expenses. . . . We weren't going to charge them rent, . . . electricity, . . . nothing like that. In fact, what happened was Baylor actually received many donations from both Tulane parents and just general citizens who sent in probably close to about \$125,000 to \$130,000 to support our efforts. . . . We actually had very few costs. We had costs to find bus passes for them, which we did through our agreement with Metro. We had a little bit of remodeling that we did in a couple of spaces for them. . . .

What we ultimately ended up doing was setting up two endowed scholarships of \$50,000 a piece. There is one endowed scholarship that sits at Tulane, and it is the Baylor College of Medicine Endowed Scholarship that goes to a third or fourth year student who is a leadership individual, who has great sense of community service. Then, at Baylor, we set up a \$50,000 endowed scholarship that goes to a graduate of the Tulane University undergraduate system that comes to Baylor that, again, is a senior level student who has exhibited outstanding leadership and community service skills. We felt like that was the right way to acknowledge what the donors intended the money to go for, which was to support Tulane students. . . . The most gratifying thing for us was that the [Baylor] president and I were invited to go to New Orleans for Tulane's [medical school] graduation . . . where he actually announced the two \$50,000 scholarships. . . .

**EV:** Did you personally ever have any surprises?


**CB:** Not any bad surprises. . . . The good surprise was just

it was almost overwhelming how appreciative people were to us. . . . When we had the opening orientation session with them, and they introduced our president, the kids gave him a two-minute standing ovation, which reduced him literally to tears.

We did double Match Day, which is a day when fourth year medical students find out which program they have been matched with to do their specialty training. It is the most exciting day for a medical student for the entire four years they are in medical school. Suddenly we were looking at doing two Match Day celebrations simultaneously because it happens on a national time clock at 11:00 a.m. Central Time on a set day. . . . Our president was in a position of wanting to be two places at one time, which

we were able to have him do, and they presented him with this beautiful angel portrait that is out in our hallway as you come in. They read this inscription from a Winnie the Pooh book about when your house blows away, and you don't know what to do, is there someone who will take you in? . . . [It had] all of their signatures around it, and it just was such an emotional setting. . . .

I guess what surprised me was what good friends we made with the Tulane students and faculty; . . . how close people became so quickly, and . . . the willingness that everyone had on both sides to make it work and make it work successfully for everyone. . . .

What we [have] found is that everyone at Baylor misses having the Tulane students here. The hallways were crowded, and the lunch line was a little longer, but there was really something fun about having people here . . . It was a chaotic time, but it was probably one of the most rewarding things that I have gotten to do at Baylor—that and Tropical Storm Allison. 



*Dr. Marc Kahn, Sr., Associate Dean for Admissions and Student Affairs at Tulane University School of Medicine, meets with students in Tulane offices at BCM.*

## WILLIAM REED:

# Using Technology to Find Lost Loved Ones

Dr. William Reed works with *Technology for All*, which began in 1997 with the goal of using technology as a tool to empower low income communities. They did this by establishing community technology centers that provide access to computers and the internet. Jenna Berger, former managing editor of *Houston History*, interviewed Dr. Reed on January 13, 2006.



*Technology for All set up 210 computers on the Reliant Center property to help evacuees locate lost loved ones.*

All photos courtesy of Mark Sloan.

**JENNA BERGER (JB):** How did you first become involved in helping with Katrina?

**WILLIAM REED (WR):** I was having breakfast with Elliott Gershenson with Interfaith Ministries . . . before folks began arriving. . . . [We] quickly discovered, through multiple websites, that there were large numbers of evacuees that did not know where other family members were, [and] . . . that one of the things that we could do . . . would be to provide public access with computers to the evacuees at the Dome. . . . By Friday night, less than twenty-four hours after the evacuees first began arriving, . . . we had set up initially a forty-station computer lab down in the theater of the Astrodome.

One of our staff members is a former SBC [Communications] employee. He called SBC. SBC put forty DSL lines into

the facility by Friday night. We called Compucycle . . . a for-profit computer recycling company. They came up with the forty initial computers. We called Sim Houston . . . plus HP let us use laptops. . . . By the end of the week, we had 210 computers in several locations on the Reliant Center property. . . .

We didn't have any [prior] official relationship [with the different organizations] . . . As evacuees would come into what we called the ACT Center, the Astrodome Community Technology Center, we discovered several things very quickly: 1) the evacuees had limited technology skills; 2) many of the evacuees had limited literacy skills; 3) they were distraught; and 4) they had been traumatized in many cases by the experience. Our initial efforts, we thought, would require maybe fifteen volunteers for the 200+ computers. Eventually, we ended up having almost one volunteer for every evacuee that walked in the door. . . .

The biggest challenge was also that you had a population that was both traumatized and, in many cases, had limited literacy both in terms of basic literacy and computer literacy. Yet, all the FEMA applications, housing information, all of that was being disseminated appropriately through websites. People had to have an email address to get a response from FEMA on their application to FEMA. Ninety-nine percent of those folks didn't have an email address, didn't understand email, didn't understand you had to have a user name and a password, and if you have it, don't lose it because you can't get your email. . . . All those different resources and things that we were doing with folks was getting them up to speed in terms of computer literacy and basic literacy to access the tools and resources that they need in this crisis. . . .

A lot of evacuees would come into the center looking for a loved one and, as a part of that process, would tell their story. . . . We put together a training manual on-the-fly there at the Dome to train volunteers in what they needed to do [stressing] . . . the importance of listening and helping people; if they wanted to tell their story, feel comfortable that they could tell their story . . .

One of the problems . . . was that you had all these organizations, corporations, websites, etc., that were trying to help people find each other. At one point, we identified fifty-six different websites for people . . . look[ing] for one another. The only problem with that is [people] are not going to find each other because [they] are looking in different places. . . . David Philo,





*Even with the computer services, finding loved ones was difficult. Technology for All continued to work with evacuees in Houston after the shelters were closed.*

the president of Yahoo! [and] a Tulane University graduate, personally took on the effort with Yahoo! employees to access the information from all those sites. Yahoo! created a web crawler that [when] you put somebody's name in, it crawls all of those sites to look for a hit. . . .

We discovered that a lot of folks who are older required reading glasses. Many had lost their reading glasses in the chaos. . . . One [Yahoo! volunteer] was working with this man who was looking for his brother. She discovered he couldn't see the screen. . . . I happened to have my own pair of reading glasses . . . and said, "Here, use mine." In the course of being able to read the screen, he discovered where his brother was, and they were able to make a phone call. I actually had written about that experience in my blog, and then the next day, we had lots of glasses show up. . . .

**JB:** I read about the young man who came into the center and now he is working for you.

**WR:** Joshua Cousin. Joshua wrote his own blog in the center, and he is out now working as a computer lab assistant at South Union Community Development Corporation. . . . In New Orleans, [he] lived in a very difficult situation in a neighborhood where he said, "I chose to stay inside because of the crime outside." In fact, [he] talked about people being murdered in the neighborhood. . . . Inside, he learned how to use the computer, and then once his house was flooded and he came to Houston, he discovered the ACT Center. We kept seeing him in there every day, and he said, no, he didn't need any help. Finally [we] discovered what he was doing.

**JB:** Have you kept progress reports on the individuals that you helped?


**WR:** A number of the volunteers have done that. . . . A lot of personal relationships were developed in those one-on-one conversations in front of the computer looking for a lost loved one, or helping someone fill out a FEMA application, or trying to figure out a way to get one's husband who is in Austin to Houston so that a couple can reconnect.

[When] Rita was getting ready to come to town . . . the decision was made to move the folks that were still there [Reliant] to other locations . . . We all packed up and left in a matter of hours that morning. It was a day of mixed emotions.

**JB:** At what point did you decide to continue helping the evacuees?

**WR:** It was pretty quick. We established . . . the Community Technology 2.0 Project, which is focused on building the capacity of community technology centers (CTCs) that are serving neighborhoods with the largest number of evacuees. . . . The new residents from New Orleans had placed a burden on social service agencies and organizations that work with folks, and we felt like with our skills and expertise, our role ought to be to increase the capacity of those organizations. . . . We are . . . helping CTCs [with] how to take a person who doesn't have any [computer literacy] skills . . . [learn to] live in today's world. . . .

**JB:** What do you think are most important things to remember in the future?

**WR:** One of the things is you have to move quickly when there is a disaster. Another thing is you have to be willing to work with people that perhaps you have never worked with before, and you have to be willing to set aside differences and put the needs of the evacuees, or those affected by the disaster first, and let those needs . . . determine what it is that you do. That is a critical piece. . . . If you see a need and you see . . . your organization can address [it], then do it. Don't wait for permission, just do it. 



*Volunteers helped Houston's "guest citizens" search for their lost loved ones.*



# Hope and Sorrow: Notes from the Dome Floor

Many interviews in this issue included heart-rending stories of the interviewees' personal encounters with our "guest citizens." Here are a few of those stories.



*On a wall inside the Dome, evacuees posted names of missing family and friends they hoped to find.*



When I went into the Dome the first time . . . walking down, the opening out onto the floor of the Dome. . . . I remember the narrator on the film clip of the crash of the Hindenburg, and he says, "Oh, the humanity." That was what rang through the back of my head. I saw all these cots covering the floor of the Dome and a sea of people; and, you know, it wasn't loud—nobody was yelling. There was talk, normal room level talk. . . . but it was just all these folks laid out on these cots with whatever belongings they had left to them piled beside them, and families trying to group together and searching for other family members.

**Dr. David Persse,**  
Director, Houston Fire Department EMS

When we went to the Dome, . . . "Oh my God!" It would just hit you. You are walking into the floor of the Dome alongside of people that are victims. . . . Some of them had mud up to their chest. There were little old ladies [who said], "Honey, don't get too close. I haven't had a shower in a few days." They would be embarrassed, and they would start crying and saying, "I'm so sorry. I've soiled myself." And you would say, "It is O.K. It is O.K." But their pride, everything was just right there—raw—and, they were apologizing to you.

**Diana Rodriguez,**  
Administrative Coordinator, Houston Fire Department EMS

I think, frankly, [one of my most vivid memories was] going down to the Astrodome and seeing two guys having lunch [at a table on the Dome floor] when an entire city is coming their way, and they are worried about their ham sandwich. We are telling them that the city of New Orleans is heading their way, and they are like, "What are you smoking, boy?" And then walking away and going, "We're in heapin' big trouble now."

**Rev. Eric Hystad,**  
Houston's Second Baptist Church

The first time I went down on the Dome floor, it was not what I expected. . . . I ran into a four or five-year-old young boy that was sitting on his cot, and I asked him if he came in last night. He said "yes," and I said, "Well, welcome to Houston." I asked him . . . "Where are your mom and dad?" He said, "My dad is getting breakfast." I said, "Fantastic." . . . I asked him again, "Where is your mom at?" He said, "Well, my dad reached for her, but she went under the water." So, the first person I . . . actually stopped and said something to was not what I anticipated in response because all of . . . the activity . . . to do something great, the first thing I heard was failure. I didn't go back on the floor for about four days. I was not prepared for that type of answer.

**Mark Sloan,**  
Director, Citizens Corps, Homeland Security Special Projects



Here, two evacuees exchanged wedding vows in the Astrodome. Although many stories were sad, stories of hope and happiness were also told.

All photos courtesy of Mark Sloan unless otherwise noted.

Bill Cosby came to the Dome, and he was giving a talk to the crowd there and asked, "How many of y'all hate the police?"... His comment to them was, "Look around you." There were all of our police officers. ... He said, "How do you feel about these guys? Do you feel safe here?" And they did ... people did not want to leave the Dome. They felt safe, they felt connected to FEMA, they were connected to each other. And they gave them [the police] a round of applause. ... I had a man come to me from New Orleans, from the Lower Ninth Ward, a very poor man, he said, "You know, I used to hate white people but you all are incredible."

**Judge Robert Eckels,**  
Harris County Judge, Director Emergency  
Management

*Instead of separate cots, people would start to put their cots together and build little, itty, bitty privacy walls with cots turned on their flip side just to sort of say this is our little family space—these three feet by three feet, the closest thing to a little home.*

**Dr. Herminia Palacio,**  
Executive Director,  
Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services

*One man that got off the bus... had a regular water bottle but the label was all torn off like he had been holding it for hours. I said, "Sir, let me have your bottle of water and here, here is a fresh, cold, clean bottle of water." He said, "Oh no, ma'am," and he about started crying. He said, "I will never, ever waste another drop of clean water again. This is precious. I'll take that bottle, but you can't have this other one."*

**Diana Rodriguez,**  
Administrative Coordinator, Houston Fire  
Department EMS



*Evacuees comfort each other on the Dome floor.*

*[A] lady showed up with a baby and said, "I don't know who this baby belongs to. I saw him in New Orleans; I picked him up off the ground. ... I don't know what to do with it but I couldn't leave it behind." Our nurses ... took that kid, and they treated it like one of their own. ... Eventually they identified who the parents were, but it took several days. But for the time that the baby was there, they had somebody there taking care of [him] 24/7 not as a nurse, perhaps, but just to be there, to hold it, to keep it company.*

**David Lopez,**  
President and CEO, Harris County Hospital District





*Volunteers filled the expanse of the Astrodome with rows of cots to welcome evacuees. Diana Rodriguez commented, "It wasn't like the Dome you could ever remember."*

When we had training, there was a group of nuns, and they all came in their white nun outfits . . . All of them had received a yellow [Operation Compassion] t-shirt, and . . . they thought that they had to put it on immediately. I was walking in front of them, and I heard one of the sweet ladies say, "I can't get my t-shirt over my head." She was trying to get this t-shirt over her habit. It was just all messed up. . . . and I said, "You don't have to put that on right now. . . ." About three minutes later, I turned around, and all of them were walking together [wearing] all those yellow shirts.

**Rev. Eric Hystad,**  
Houston's Second Baptist Church

In that kind of a mass shelter, there are always rumors going around of things happening. . . . I remember a lady that came in and said six children were killed last night. Nobody was killed last night in the Astrodome. They said the body was out there, and they were hiding it. I said, "Ma'am, there is no higher authority here than me, and I will assure you there was nobody found in the south parking lot last night."

**Judge Robert Eckels,**  
Harris County Judge,  
Director Emergency Management

There was one guy from New Orleans, a big guy, maybe around 6'5", 6'6" maybe 350 pounds. He was sitting there, and he was crying. . . . We said, "Are you okay?" . . . He said, "I've had pain all my life, and I've learned to live with it, but today is the first day . . . that I don't have pain. . . . I come here, and your doctors check me out. I had dental abscesses." We even had a mobile dental unit there. They brought him in, took out the teeth that were rotten, and his pain went away.

**David Lopez,**  
President and CEO, Harris County Hospital District

I brought my wife and daughter out to the Dome . . . My daughter decided that she wanted to bring something for the kids and had a huge collection of Barbie dolls that she had inherited . . . So she went around the floor giving out Barbie dolls to all the kids; and, to me, what epitomized the spirit of these people. . . . [was that] one of the little girls that Kirby had given her doll to save [Kirby] a little book and said, "Thank you. I want to give you something, too." It wasn't that they were just wanting to get. They wanted to give back.

**Judge Robert Eckels,**  
Harris County Judge, Director  
Emergency Management



One man who received dental work at the clinic had relief from his pain for the first time in fifteen years.

Photo courtesy of David Lopez.

A young man [who was "belligerent" about having to check in] . . . finally gave in and answered the questions, and he got his bed. . . . Two or three hours later, he came back to that same place, to those same volunteers, and he said, "I want to apologize to you" . . . He had been on his housetop for two days, had been rescued, and put on three different buses. . . . He didn't have any friends or relatives [here]. He said, "I am homeless, I have no possessions. . . . Everything I own is under water." He said, "I was sitting over there in my bed thinking, 'These people care for me. Why am I angry?' " . . . He ended up getting a place to stay here in Houston . . . getting something to drive . . . and actually got a job here in the course of one week.

**Rev. Eric Hystad,** Houston's Second Baptist Church



# FEMA: NO SURPRISE, NO CONSENSUS

Throughout the interviews on Houston's response to Katrina, the interviewees discussed their varied opinions based on personal experiences with FEMA. Included are selections of statements by the interviewees that demonstrate the differing points of view on the topic.

**REV. J. ERIC HYSTAD**, *Houston's Second Baptist Church, "Operation Compassion":*

I can't imagine the mandate and the workload that that group had. I am sure not defending FEMA because I know that they had some issues; but what I saw was they tried to do the best they could with limited resources, and it was very difficult. Whenever they ran into a problem, they tried to fix it. . . . even if it was wrong, [they] did try to fix it. . . . I saw people with great intentions trying to do the best they could. It is just sometimes when you are working with an organization like that, the red tape just kills you.

**DR. KENNETH MATTOX**, *Professor and Vice Chairman of Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine, Chief of Staff at Ben Taub Hospital:*

FEMA had no earthly idea of what our needs were or how to accomplish those needs. . . . We noticed, by the fourth day, the people even who had not had jobs, felt invigorated by what Houston had done and were reaching up with their hand and saying, this is like a religious revival experience. I want to be part of my future. But then, all of a sudden, they changed from their hand out for you to help lift them up, to a hand out to say

give me some money. . . . FEMA and the Red Cross were now handing out dollars, \$2,000 debit cards. . . . Did the people need \$2,000? No. They had three meals a day; they had a bed. We were trying to get them jobs. We were trying to get their kids in school. Mattress Mack [Jim McIngvale, owner of Gallery Furniture in Houston] was out offering them jobs. But when they were getting \$2,000 debit cards, they said, "You're going to give me money? I'll stay right here and get my next check." If you define a welfare state, . . . they created it.

\*\*\*

FEMA . . . sailed [two cruise ships] to Galveston, then ordered us . . . to find 6,000 people to put on those cruise ships to unload the Astrodome. They didn't ask us, "Will these people go?" Put yourself in the position of our evacuees. These individuals were separated from their family and, by day four, were just beginning to find that their family was in Mississippi, and Amarillo, and Chicago. . . . Plus, some of them had been in the water for three days before they got over here. When we went to the floor of the Astrodome to say, "We need you to go down to Galveston to sit on a cruise ship in the middle of the water," they said, "No. I don't want to be in any more water the rest of my life."

*Linda Jeffers, an evacuee from New Orleans, stated in an interview for Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston that she told officials in a meeting held at Reliant in early September that the evacuees needed money. Shortly after, FEMA began handing out the \$2,000 debit cards that became very controversial.*

*Photo courtesy of Mark Sloan.*







*This group of DMAT technicians from Colorado learned quickly to replace their FEMA shirts with their regular DMAT Colorado shirts.*

*Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.*

**MICHAEL MOORE**, *Chief of Staff to Mayor Bill White:*

We first got a really small group of actual FEMA employees, and they put out the call, and this group from Colorado came out, EMS [and] medical technicians. They were great, but they were all wearing FEMA shirts. They took those FEMA shirts off so fast, and they wore their regular EMS [shirts] from Colorado. . . .

FEMA was like a book, and if it wasn't in the book you couldn't do it. . . .

If any disaster comes in, it's not the state, it's not the federal government, it is the locals here [who] are going to be the first responders . . . You've got to rely on yourself; and you have to be able to rely on the resources around you.

**DR. DAVID PERSSE**, *Director of Emergency Medical Services for the City of Houston:*

From my perspective, FEMA did a number of things right. They prepositioned a lot of resources, . . . It would have been much worse had they not done some of the smart things that they did for which they have gotten no credit. During Katrina, there were untold numbers of ambulances repositioned from across the country sent down to . . . get into New Orleans and help out after Katrina went through. Most people don't know that. The one place where they were prestaged was at Reliant Center. We wound up, during both Katrina and Rita, using those extremely effectively . . . Had they not been there, I don't know what we would have done. The Houston Fire Department ambulances were already taxed responding to the normal 9-1-1 calls . . . There is no way we could have taken the Houston Fire Department ambulances and sent them [to] evacuate nursing homes during Katrina. . . . I wound up benefiting from them thinking ahead.

There were DMAT teams—disaster medical assistance teams—which were prepositioned in anticipation of Katrina. . . . There was a place on Interstate 10 . . . where ambulances from Texas could get to and pick up patients, and turn around,

*Dr. David Persse thinks FEMA got a bad wrap. FEMA sent helicopters, DMAT teams, and ambulances that helped with Houston's response to Katrina.*

*Photo courtesy of Diana Rodriguez.*

and bring them back. The Blackhawk helicopters were going into New Orleans, . . . landing on the overpass . . . offloading these patients to the DMAT [then] to triage, provide immediate care for, and stabilize them, . . . then put them in ambulances and drive them to Houston. Those helicopters? FEMA got them there. Those DMAT teams? FEMA got them there. Those ambulances? FEMA got them there . . . I came to rely heavily on what FEMA had done right.

**JENNIFER POSTON**, *Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, Manager of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Response:*

FEMA had a target painted on its back, but if you trace back where a lot of this comes from, it is legislative. The American people need to go back and talk to their representatives about changing things like the Stafford Act. . . . [It] sets up the parameters that allow the federal government to turn on the faucet for assistance. It is an extremely huge, cantankerous document . . . that goes through everything in order for a town, a city, or a state to qualify for a disaster. . . . For example, . . . what FEMA qualifies as water damage to your home, is twenty-four inches of water. . . . If you have eighteen inches, your house does not fall in the parameters of being damaged . . . Those kinds of parameters within the Stafford Act . . . cheat a lot of people. ❧





# SURVIVING KATRINA AND RITA IN HOUSTON:

## Conversations with Shari Smothers, Marie Barney, Glenda Harris, and Linda Jeffers

Two major hurricanes hit the Gulf Coast in 2005, forcing approximately 250,000 people into the Houston area, with as many as 100,000 remaining here. Dr. Carl Lindahl, the Martha Gano Professor of English at the University of Houston, and Pat Jasper, who founded Texas Folklife Resources, led the effort to collect their oral histories—the first large-scale project in which the survivors of a major disaster have taken the lead in documenting it. The survivors received training and compensation to record fellow survivors' stories of the storm, their memories of home, and their ongoing struggles to build new communities in exile. Their paychecks helped fill an obvious need for income, but more importantly, their training and documentary experience enhanced their prospects for building new careers. For more information on Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston visit [www.katrinaandrita.org](http://www.katrinaandrita.org). Included are a few of their reflections on the City of Houston.

**SHARI SMOTHERS**, one of the survivor-interviewers, recalled how participating in this project affected her:

Once it set in that we were not going to be able to return home, families began to get on with the necessary things . . . Things began to happen that surprised me a little. There were fights breaking out at some schools amongst the children. New Orleans children fought with Houston children. . . . A particularly offensive news clip that aired then still sticks with me. It featured a woman bitterly spitting out, "They need to go back where they came from!" That segment was looped over and again in the news trailer, reinforcing the sensationalist predisposition of the media, those cliffhanger ratings chasers: "... Details at six . . ."

This parent wished to send back a large group of people to New Orleans when most of the neighborhoods had no running water, no electricity, schools incapable of reopening, severely impaired healthcare facilities. She wished New Orleans parents and children to return to an unclean city, unhealthy living conditions, and unknown health hazards. It's my hope that she hadn't considered such facts.

As late as May 2006, I heard a news headline state, "Houston's crime rate increases by double digits. New Orleans evacuees may be to blame. Details at ten." . . . I thought of my seventy-year-old parents who never robbed anyone, their neighbors who worked all their lives, and my friends who were employed in various fields as productive members of the New Orleans community. Only a week earlier I spoke over the phone with an employee of my complex. The woman stated that she "hated to say it," but the break-in the complex had experienced was probably the result of the people of New Orleans. . . . She had no idea . . . that I was one of her "suspects." . . .

I was advised at the job placement agency to keep any mention of New Orleans off my résumé to stand a better chance of landing an interview. . . . deny[ing] an integral part of my life.



*A survivor herself, Shari Smothers took part in the Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston project as an interviewer, embracing the opportunity to let people tell their stories.*

Photo courtesy of Shari Smothers.

. . . People buying into these stereotypes and distortions are not people who will be changed if I run around with a sign saying, "We're not all bad; I didn't do it." . . .

**AFTER SEEING** the ad for a job with the Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston project, Shari Smothers went to the presentation and immediately wanted to take part.

I liked the idea of being a part of something that sought to give us each a voice when it seemed no one wanted to give us audience individually. It presented a venue to have our stories heard for all time by anyone willing to hear them. . . . The Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston project seeks to provide that forum, to collect and preserve those memories in the Library of Congress, the University of Houston archives, and other useful repositories. And I get to be a part of that. . . .

As a member of this project, I was charged with the responsibility of finding and interviewing twelve people . . . Through this project, I've met some good people who were separated from places and people familiar to them. . . . As they told their stories, I watched and listened as they were moved to tears in the retelling. I traveled with tissues to each interview because I could never be sure what to expect. I heard them find joy and laughter in the midst of the grief. I heard them speak with resigned acceptance as they talked about feeling as though they'd suffered a death. And I heard them say how their faith managed—and how it continues—to sustain them throughout the ordeal . . .

When I was asked to share about only one of the twelve interviews that I took part in, I didn't know which one to pick because I find significance in all the voices, heard and not: the voices that are heard in bits and pieces, and those that have something to say but not the courage, are represented in all that we are doing. I decided to share the interview done with my godmother. Hers is a story of great loss just prior to Katrina, a story of surviving and continuing, with no time for satisfactory grieving.

**MARIE D. BARNEY**, who had buried her husband just a few days before Katrina, was interviewed by Smothers on April 11, 2006.

We didn't realize that this storm was as near as it was and that it was actually going to hit our area. . . . We started at around eleven thirty or twelve o'clock, and we must've reached Houston probably about four thirty the next morning. . . . We had reserved our hotel suite so we did have a place to rest and to stay. . . .

I did find a church which was a very wonderful church with a pastor that was just outstanding. But, it was a mega church, it was this huge church. I was not accustomed to that; I was accustomed to my own little small church where I knew everybody and everything. . . . I did find a church in my denomination where I occasionally went . . . between the two that's what . . . I guess you could say [are] my church homes. . . .

Between that and finding my way around Houston, that was the next



*Marie Barney shared her story of great loss, surviving, and continuing to go forward.*

*Photo courtesy of Marie Barney.*

thing because if you know New Orleans, [it] has one Interstate that you get on and you pass straight through. . . . Because if you were on the Interstate, you were just going in one direction, coming back in one direction. . . . When I got here to Houston, the Interstate looked like spaghetti to me. . . .

I guess one of the plusses about being here was that I found that my medical care was pretty readily available. I knew had I gone any place else, I probably wouldn't have gotten some things done as quickly as I did. With coming here, that was a blessing because I had surgery on my back. And I had some other little challenges, and they were corrected or worked on, that kind of thing. . . .

Some [New Orleans] friends I've hooked up with here in Houston . . . I guess you count your blessings and everything. And I think Katrina, trying to just survive those first few days kind of took my mind away from my husband a whole lot. I don't know if I ever really had any grief time, to tell you the truth because things moved so fast. You just had no time.

**GLENDA JONES STEVENSON HARRIS** was born in New Orleans and grew up in the Lower Ninth Ward area, where she remained and raised her own family. She saw the area transcend from a neighborhood of low income homeowners and working class people to a "community that was just left abandoned for vagrants." She became a hospital nurse, always putting needs of children first. Before Katrina she was appointed to the American Red Cross Board of Brother's Keeper that dealt with hurricane evacuations. She had never forgotten that the National Guard had brought in 18,000 body bags, anticipating the elderly could not be evacuated in a timely manner for Hurricane Ivan. After her interview, Harris became director of the Katrina Citizens Leadership Corps, a branch of the Children's Defense Fund. In 2007, her work with Katrina children brought her back to New Orleans, where she also served as co-chair of the New Orleans Industrial Development Board and as Associate Minister of Ebenezer Baptist Church. She died in New Orleans on February 2, 2010, at the age of fifty-two.

We were blessed and we were fortunate [for] every opportunity of resources that Houstonians offered to us—churches and non-profit organizations—I was very pleased. People were very helpful. I went to the grocery store and people were telling me, "Look, you know, if you need some food, my church is giving out food. If you need some clothing . . ." And when they would see me with my small grandbabies, it was amazing. I had people to walk up to me and give me twenty-dollar bills, thirty dollars.

I was in a grocery store line in Kroger and a lady said, "Let



*Glenda Harris had been an advocate for children all of her life and was committed to community service in New Orleans and Houston after Katrina.*

*Photo courtesy of Alice McNamara.*

me pay for everything in your basket." . . . When they got all their milk, they bought their Pampers. Bought everything they needed, and I was saying, "No, I'm all right," and they'd say, "No, we have to do something." . . .

There were people in the VA Hospital. I went there to get my uncle some other medicines. A lady was there letting people use





*Glenda Harris at the University of Houston.*

Photo courtesy of Alice McNamara.

her cell phone because people's cell phones were not working from New Orleans. . . . Sitting there with tears in her eyes. "I got to do something. Take my cell phone. . . . Call or do anything that you need to do. Don't worry about if it's long distance . . ."

I think the greatest thing about Houston, Texas, for us as a matter of evacuees was that before the federal government or any governmental agency could say anything, the people out of their hearts, in Houston, reached out their arms, and reached out their hands, and reached out their heart and say, "I understand. If it's not but by the grace of God, it could have been us rather than you all. So we—we're grateful and we're going to do all we can to help you." . . .

I saw a young couple out of Spring Tabernacle Church take another young couple that I referred to them and brought them to Galaxy [sic] Furniture store and bought them every room and piece of furniture that they needed. And I know that had to be very expensive . . . It was amazing to me. I stood in the middle of Gallery Furniture store crying. And no one could understand, but I realize now that I don't cry about what I lost, because I cry about the miracles that I saw. . . . Our legacies ought to be about how we touch the lives of people, how we make a difference—because that's our truest legacy. Because when we're buried in a grave in the ground, we can't take a house with us, we can't take a car, but what we can take with us is the lives of people that we touched and how we've made a difference. . . .

Another minister called me . . . said, "Glenda, I know you're working with some families there in Houston. Let me do something to help them. . . . let me pay the rent for two families." And so I saw the blessings in the word of God come true, that when you give just to the least of these, He will double the offering. And so I saw that over and over and over again. . . .

As God started moving me throughout Houston, I went to the Reliant Center, I went to George [R.] Brown, and I found people

that had been through the shelter process at the Superdome, who were angry, who were upset. I was able to direct them to resources that helped them and even brought some of them to the facilities that helped them. It made a difference for me, it gave me something to do more than just to think about what I had lost. . . . I left my house in the morning, left the hotel—or I call it my house—the hotel in the morning at eight or nine o'clock and I didn't get back till five o'clock in the evening, like I was on a regular job. . . .

I thank God . . . that I had the appropriate insurance . . . it allowed me to be free, because I was able to work with my insurance very easily, but it allowed me to be free to help other people who were having problems with their insurance company, or who didn't have insurance, to assist in with applying for FEMA, or knowing where to go to get assistance that they needed. I was so grateful to see the Disaster Recovery Center open, because it was like I had a regular taxicab bringing people [there]. . . . I remember one time, the lady I met at Spring Tabernacle Church and she said that their church [was] going to help a few families. And I started bringing people to the church, and she said, "Well, Glenda, I just got a question: how many people did you tell, that we were doing assistance?" I say, "Well, you know, I got a big mouth, so I tell everybody when I find something good, and I find people who have a heart." . . .

I love Houston; I love the people of Houston. They've done a wonderful job. But I know the assignment that God has for me, for all that I've done here, He has prepared me to go back to rebuild that city [New Orleans]. . . . Anything that I can [do] to contribute to this city, I'll do. I think that my family for the most part, most of the younger people in my family, my young daughters have found great opportunities here, and want to stay here in Houston. And I applaud that. I applaud them wanting to move forward and be progressive.

**LINDA JEFFERS** was from Gentilly area. A widow, she had owned her own business since 1984 in which she assisted people in acquiring licenses, most often for restaurants and bars. Her work to organize Katrina survivors continues to the present day. In Houston, she worked with the grassroots movement America Speaks. Returning to New Orleans in 2008, she has worked with the Rebuilding Lives Coalition and as an advocate for the homeless in the Equity and Inclusion movement. She is currently working with victims of the BP Gulf Coast oil disaster.

[After being evacuated by the National Guard,] I got on that last bus . . . They would not tell us where they were going, but they said, “We’re going to get you out of the city.” . . . out of those thirty-two buses, the bus I was on and one other bus, we got to Houston. . . . And that’s how I ended up in the Astrodome. . . . Red Cross gave me a cot. And there was some kids that was sitting like up in the bleacher part. So I got them to come down there and went back to Red Cross, got them some beds. . . . I still had that lady from Honduras [who I had helped rescue], her and her baby with me, and we were able to make a call to her husband—some family to come from New York to get her . . . That’s where I found myself.

There was a group that came into the Astrodome called the Metropolitan Organization [TMO], and they said if anybody wants to have a voice, have any problems, they told us to come to the medical part in the Astrodome. To come up there and be there for two o’clock. I said, “Wow!” Because at this moment in time . . . there was no means of real communication. Had a cell phone that was dead as they could get it. . . . I had my bible . . . And I had a purse. And that’s what I—that was me. . . . And what I had on. That’s all I had.

I had started moving around the Astrodome, meeting people. And I used to sit up all night with everybody else to go talk to the elderly because at eleven o’clock, they would turn the lights—not all the way off, but turn them down. And seem when they would do that, that everybody would sit up. . . . I would get up and walk all night. Met officers, security, whatever. Talk to them. The volunteers and everybody was very kind to me. But nobody still didn’t know what was going to happen.

On the same day, that the Metropolitan Organization came. And Oprah Winfrey, T. D. Jakes, all your big boys. Different movie stars. Throughout that, Hillary—that would come in,

moving out. Jessie Jackson. But they was just doing—like an entourage. But still, nothing for comfort for people. . . . I want to go up there at two o’clock and find out what them people are talking about. Because I just felt like it was going to be a break through. And it was. Because we got there—they say that they had been deemed authorized by the Mayor of Houston and Judge Eckels to find out what could they do to make people comfortable there. . . . They had about 22,000 people in the Astrodome. And only eighty people went up there because everybody else was excited about the stars. . . .



*After Hurricane Katrina, Linda Jeffers continued her work to organize Katrina survivors in Houston and in New Orleans, where she returned in 2008.*

Photo courtesy of Alice McNamara.


Kids—at this point in time they been in the Astrodome. So they [were] like—oh my God—bouncing off every wall they had. . . . So they set up a play area right outside the Astrodome. And through TMO they made this possible for us. And we asked for them to do a daycare. They did a daycare right down by medical to give the mothers a break. All of this happened within twenty-four hours after the request.

[A few days later,] they did arrange a meeting, TMO, I met with Mayor White, Judge Eckels and Mr. Costello. He was the gentleman

that was over FEMA. . . . They asked, “what did we want?” So I spoke for people from the city, from New Orleans. . . . The only thing I told them was we needed money. Mr. Costello asked—he say, “I don’t know what we’ll be able to do, but we might be able to get a grant through Congress.” . . . Everybody’s cell phone was being turned off. . . . They appealed and they allowed our cell phones to remain on. . . . Some people phones, on as much as a year. But they didn’t charge us. That was the only means of being able to connect with somebody else was that cell phone.

...

Since January of 2006 and coming into 2007, being here in Houston, I’ve had an opportunity to work very closely with people through social services agencies, such as Catholic Charities. . . . Jewish Family Services, United Way—those people worked. And Neighborhood Centers—those people gave me access to the services and the people throughout Houston area. . . .

I petitioned to congress-persons coming out the latter part of 2006 to ask that they come together from both Louisiana and Texas, united in order to be able to do things . . . I’m working with America Speaks that will allow us an opportunity to have a voice in rebuilding. And I am going to D.C. and I will go before Congress to petition them, to lobby them, to create something that will pick up the disabled and the elderly who don’t have an opportunity to have an opportunity. And I love you. 



# UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON: **CONTRIBUTIONS TO KATRINA EFFORT**

*By Aimee L'Heureux*

The University of Houston (UH) helped the evacuees displaced by Hurricane Katrina in many ways. All four UH System institutions accepted and enrolled students from many Gulf coast universities including Xavier, Tulane, Loyola, and the University of New Orleans. At least one hundred staff members and between twenty to thirty student volunteers worked with these students. In addition, the UH System established the Katrina Student Assistance Fund to help cover the cost of books, school supplies, computer equipment, clothing, and other needs for displaced students. The fund provided financial assistance to UHS students from affected areas whose families suffered from the hurricane.

## **UH COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY**

Dr. Staley Woo and Dr. Lloyd Pate, both clinical faculty from the UH College of Optometry (UHCO), coordinated one of the larger Katrina support efforts. Dr. Woo, who works in the Low Vision Clinic, headed the optometry services provided at the George R. Brown; and Dr. Pate, who works in the Casa De Amigos Clinic, which is a UHCO City of Houston Partnership, ran the Reliant Park clinic. They transported equipment, helped to

secure donations and volunteers, and treated patients. Working with the University of Houston College of Optometry students, and alongside volunteers and ophthalmology residents from Baylor, they treated over 2,800 patients, six percent of whom had glaucoma, and thirty percent who were diagnosed with eye disease.

They obtained frames, blank lenses, and an edger to make glasses on site. More than 1,500 glasses were prescribed and dispensed. They obtained contacts, pharmaceuticals, and additional instrumentation needed to keep things flowing smoothly. When the temporary shelters closed, Woo and Pate continued services at the University Eye Institute at no charge. The UH University Eye Institute clinic sat 1,236 patients, 75 requiring medical exams, and 118 with an ophthalmic procedure; 1,064 glasses were dispensed, and 138 pairs of contacts.

Dr. Woo and Dr. Pate received the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge Award, which was established as a way to say "thank you" to citizens or organizations whose projects reflected the American spirit of volunteerism and community service.



*Dr. Stanley Woo and Dr. Lloyd Pate, UH College of Optometry faculty, provided optometry services at the George R. Brown Convention Center and Reliant Park. They, along with UH College of Optometry students, volunteers, and ophthalmology residents from Baylor, treated over 2,800 patients.*

*All photos by Tom Shea, courtesy of University of Houston.*

## Various UH departments and programs expanded their services to the community as part of their educational process including:

- The C. T. Bauer College of Business and the Honors College established the Water Fund to purchase enough beverages to fill several eighteen-wheeler trucks.
- UH Career Services created a web page where corporate, business, and governmental agencies posted temporary and part-time jobs for displaced workers.
- The M. D. Anderson Library and the Houston Alumni Organization were collection points of a drive to collect new and used books, new stuffed animals, playing cards, and dominoes for children and adults.
- The Metropolitan Volunteer Program (MVP) collected food, clothing, toys, and supplies for evacuees.
- The Muslim Student Association sold blue and white support ribbons for a \$1 donation. All proceeds were donated to the American Red Cross.
- Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management student organizations collected canned vegetables, cereals, canned juices, and bottled water.
- The Department of Clinical Sciences and Administration's registered pharmacists faculty volunteered their services to local pharmacies and hospitals in the city. Fourth-year pharmacy students volunteered to provide services at the Astrodome.
- The College of Pharmacy Office of Student Affairs assisted displaced first and fourth-year pharmacy students of Xavier University with admissions, transfer, and placement issues.
- KUHT-TV, Houston PBS accepted clothing, diapers, and baby formula.
- The Graduate School of Social Work assisted with childcare and with direct mental health crisis intervention.
- The Counseling and Testing Center and the Psychological Research and Services Center helped individuals suffering from anxiety, post-traumatic stress syndrome, and depression.
- The Moores School of Music accepted donations for the Red Cross at several concerts.
- The UH Law Center, through a special section of the People's Law School, assisted with legal questions, and helped with FEMA paperwork by utilizing law student volunteers.
- The Houston Speech and Hearing Clinic in the Department of Communication Disorders helped survivors replace their lost or damaged hearing aids and provided speech therapy for those whose therapy had been interrupted.
- Cougar PEP and UH Wellness sponsored a month-long food drive accepting canned goods at multiple locations on campus.
- UH Air Force ROTC cadets were the first to respond to volunteer for Texas Southern University's point of distribution (POD) site and were the first to open the UH POD site after Hurricane Ike. 🏳️



*Dr. Lloyd Pate and a UH College of Optometry student Joshua Morrison set up an eye exam chart at the George R. Brown Convention Center.*



# News Updates & Books *by Barbara Eaves*

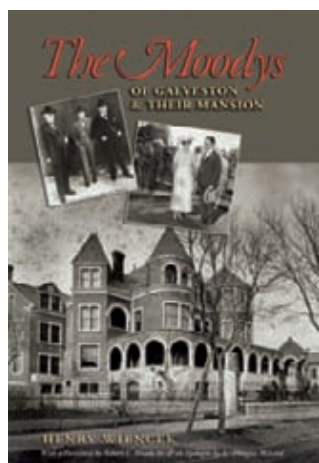
## TEXAS BOOKS:



***Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community***, by Monica Perales, assistant professor of history at the University of Houston (University of North Carolina Press, available September 2010).

Company town. Blighted community. Beloved home. Nestled on the banks of the Rio Grande, at the heart of a railroad, mining, and smelting empire, Smeltertown—La Esmelda, as its residents called it—was home to generations of

ethnic Mexicans who labored at the American Smelting and Refining Company in El Paso, Texas. Using newspapers, personal archives, photographs, employee records, parish newsletters, and interviews with former residents, including her own relatives, Monica Perales unearths the history of this forgotten community. Spanning almost a century, *Smeltertown* traces the birth, growth, and ultimate demise of a working class community in the largest U.S. city on the Mexican border and places ethnic Mexicans at the center of transnational capitalism and the making of the urban West. Perales shows that Smeltertown was composed of multiple real and imagined social worlds created by the company, the church, the schools, and the residents themselves. Within these dynamic social worlds, residents forged permanence and meaning in the shadow of the smelter's giant smokestacks. *Smeltertown* provides insight into how people and places invent and reinvent themselves and illuminates a vibrant community grappling with its own sense of itself and its place in history and collective memory. Visit <http://uncpress.unc.edu> to pre-order today.



***The Moodys of Galveston & Their Mansion***, by Henry Wiencek (Texas A&M University Press, 2010, \$19.95).

Galveston's Moody family lived in a magnificent four-story mansion at Broadway and 26th Street for more than eight decades—from a few months after the 1900 Storm to a few years after Hurricane Alicia in 1983. It opened to the public in 1991 as a museum. This is a story of the family, their fortune, and their four-story, 28,000-square-foot

home. Robert L. Moody, Sr., grandson of W. L. Moody, Jr., and nephew of Mary Moody Northen, contributes a foreword; Douglas McLeod summarizes the family's accomplishments and the developments associated with the mansion since

Northen's death in 1986. This beautifully illustrated book will be interesting to the thousands who tour the mansion each year and others who want to know more about this legendary family. [www.tamupress.com](http://www.tamupress.com).



***Journey to LaSalle's Settlement*** by Melodie Cuate (Texas Tech University Press, 2010, \$17.95).

This is the fifth in Cuate's award-winning series of books that transports middle school readers back to actual events in Texas history via a trunk owned by their teacher, Mr. Barrington. [www.ttup.ttu.edu](http://www.ttup.ttu.edu).

Kami Hancock, won first prize (out of 260 fourth grade entries) in the 2010 Daughters of the Republic of Texas's

statewide essay contest for reviewing Cuate's book. Kami is the daughter of Tristan and Judee Hancock and was a student at Stephen F. Austin Elementary School in Baytown. The family has since moved to Canyon, near Amarillo.

Kami writes:

With Mr. Barrington's magic trunk, anything is possible, including traveling back in time to LaSalle's settlement. Melodie Cuate brings young readers a book of adventure, excitement, and survival from the past.

As three of Mr. Barrington's students push the strange trunk in his classroom into a closet, sand and water begin to pour out into his classroom, sweeping Jackie, Hannah, and Nick into the middle of the ocean near La Belle, one of LaSalle's ship. After they (and the trunk) are rescued, they discover a list of items they must gather in order to return home. Along their journey, they encounter historical figures—some helpful and some harmful—and survive dangerous situations. All three also discover an appreciation for history and the importance of their friendship.

I didn't want to put this book down because it captured my mind, and the excitement kept me entertained. At the same time, I unconsciously learned the facts about living in LaSalle's settlement at Matagorda.



## HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY:



PHASE I of the \$32 million expansion and restoration of the Julia Ideson Building—the new 21,500-square-foot, state-of-the-art archival wing for the Houston Public Library's Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC)—opened in April. You are invited to visit the new HMRC as well as the adjacent reading garden and open-air loggia (entrance at the corner of Smith and Lamar).

The HMRC is the largest repository of Houston's history. It has one of the largest map collections in Texas, with some that date back to 1561. Its collections also include four million photographs, 125,000 architectural drawings from more than 250 architects, and 12,000 rare books.



PHASE II, the restoration of the exterior and the architecturally significant and beautiful interior of the original 1926 building, will be completed by summer of 2011.

The Julia Ideson Library Preservation Partners launched a \$32 million capital campaign in October 2007. To date, it has raised \$31.4 million—including \$15 million from the City of Houston. For more information, or to make a tax-deductible contribution to Phase II, visit [www.ideson.org](http://www.ideson.org) or call JILPP Executive Director Margaret Lawler at 713-660-0772.

## AWARDS:

**THE VIRGINIA M. LAW AWARD** is endowed by Mrs. Law's daughter, Nancy M. Law, and given annually by the Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library. It goes to the

author/illustrator of a book for young adults (grades 7-12) that most accurately portrays the history of Texas, whether fiction or non-fiction. Deadline for entries is December 31, 2010. Visit [www.drthl.org](http://www.drthl.org) for complete information.

**THE 2010 JULIA IDESON AWARD** is given for the best work using the Houston Metropolitan Research Center collections in its creation. Entries must be submitted by June 1, 2011, and awards are announced at the October meeting of its sponsor, the Friends of the Texas Room. For complete information, contact Dick Dickerson at [dickd@uh.edu](mailto:dickd@uh.edu). The winning book will be available at Brazos or River Oaks bookstores. Call 713-523-0701 or 713-520-0061, respectively.

## NEW HISTORY WEBSITES:

Three Houston history groups have opened web sites. Check them out! Better yet, post your group's upcoming events—be sure to include contact information along with event description/date.

[www.HoustonPreservation.org](http://www.HoustonPreservation.org) – This site is sponsored by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission through the City of Houston Planning & Development Department. It includes articles on historic buildings, virtual walking tours of historic districts, and a questions forum, "Ask Charlotte," which answers viewers' historic preservation questions. "We look forward to hearing from you," says Betty Trapp Chapman, Chair.

[www.houstonhistoryassociation.org](http://www.houstonhistoryassociation.org) – This website has come out of a 2005 task force created by former Mayor Bill White. Its primary purpose is to educate Houstonians about our city's history—via the website, a newsletter, and/or a guide for researching neighborhood histories. It is also creating a network of historical, archival, and preservation groups, and sponsoring special events to celebrate the heritage of our city. For more information, email [info@houstonhistoryassociation.org](mailto:info@houstonhistoryassociation.org).

[www.friendsofsanjacinto.org](http://www.friendsofsanjacinto.org) – The preservation and restoration of the San Jacinto Battleground is this group's primary purpose. The Friends group also has a strong emphasis on the history of revolutionary Texas scholarship and education represented by the annual San Jacinto Symposium, archaeology, publishing, and other activities. Three presentations from the April 2010 Symposium are currently posted on the site.

## BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE



Contact us at  
[HoustonHistory@uh.edu](mailto:HoustonHistory@uh.edu) or 713-743-3123  
Subscribers—\$5 per issue  
Non-subscribers—\$10 per issue



# Houston History Magazine—Subscribe Today

## SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

## GIFT SUBSCRIPTION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### INDIVIDUAL:

- ☐ One Year – \$15    ☐ Two Years – \$30  
☐ STUDENT: One Year – \$10  
(Include copy of Student ID)  
☐ INSTITUTION: One Year – \$25  
☐ DONATION: \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Check or Money Order  
(payable to the University of Houston)  
Credit Card: ☐ VISA    ☐ MasterCard  
☐ Discover    ☐ American Express

Card No.: \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Security Code \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

RETURN TO: University of Houston  
Center for Public History  
547 Agnes Arnold Hall  
Houston, TX 77204-3007

## In Search of Houston's History

Order your copy of the award-winning documentary that explores the archival collections of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, located in Houston Public Library's historic Julia Ideson Building.

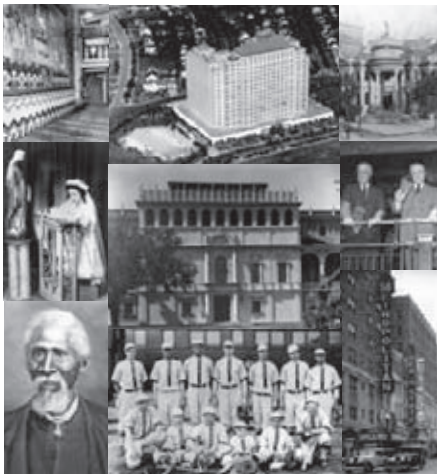
The program is a nostalgic look at some of Houston's most colorful events and historic landmarks. From Union Station to the Rice Hotel, Roy Rogers at

the rodeo in Sam Houston Coliseum, the grand opening of the Shamrock Hotel, the elaborate downtown movie palaces, the old City Auditorium and Buff Stadium are just some examples of what you'll see.

To order your DVD of "In Search of Houston's History," produced by the Friends of the Texas Room, clip and mail this form. Mail with your check,

payable to Friends of the Texas Room, to:  
Friends of the Texas Room  
P. O. Box 27827  
Houston, Texas 77227-7827

Cost for each DVD is \$30, which includes shipping and handling. Proceeds benefit the Houston Metropolitan Research Center and the archival collections of the Houston Public Library



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Quantity @ \$30 each \_\_\_\_\_ Total amount enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

"In Search of Houston's History," copyright 2008 Friends of the Texas Room

0073043943  
University of Houston  
Center for Public History  
547 Agnes Arnold Hall  
Houston, TX 77204-3007

NONPROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Houston, TX  
PERMIT NO. 5910

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

# SAN JACINTO MUSEUM

Discover Texas  
at the San Jacinto  
Museum of History

Visit the Monument  
and walk in the  
footsteps of history

Open Daily  
9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

For information &  
reservations, call

281 479 2421

[www.sanjacinto-museum.org](http://www.sanjacinto-museum.org)

San Jacinto Battleground  
State Historic Site

