

The Rice Voelker Fund for Recovery

February 26, 2018

There is a fitting Irish colloquialism for sudden and unexpected shock and dismay. The term joins the Gaelic word for mouth, *gob*, with the more familiar word for a sharp blow, *smack*, to produce *gobsmack*.

And gobsmacked best describes the populations of East Texas, South Florida, and Puerto Rico after the pinball effect that Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria had on them all. The same could be said for the agents of relief at F.E.M.A. and charitable organizations whose resources were rendered to a point of exhaustion during the thirty days of pounding from those storms.

After Harvey struck the Houston-Beaumont area, we learned of the Ardoin Family that had evacuated to Waco. The Ardoins were in a motel there with their five daughters when the mother became suddenly ill and later died in the hospital there. Mr. Ardoin now finds himself a young widower with five kids (oldest 10 years) to raise and support. The fund contributed \$1000 to a fundraiser conducted by the Waco Community.

The fund also contributed to an animal rescue effort in Texas and Florida by our local humane society. Volunteers journeyed to areas affected by Harvey and Irma to relieve the overflow of rescued animals and transport them here for adoption.

When the two other storms followed in succession, our fund experienced its own moment of gobsmack. Our limited resources and geographic distance from the events dictated selective giving to organizations with proven performance in such situations. We chose the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities (an organization separate from the Church whose clients are overwhelmingly non-Catholic), and Doctors Without Borders. From all evidence we have seen, all three have lived up to our expectations. That is especially true in Puerto Rico where over a quarter of the population is still without power.

In April our own area experienced a violent weather system that brought tragedy to the Alexander family of Breaux Bridge. After the father, Edrick, left for work a tornado destroyed the family's mobile home killing his wife and three-year-old son. The fund sent \$1000 to Edrick Alexander who literally lost everything dear to him.

For fifty years Leroy Hawkins has served the Royal Orleans Hotel as its doorman. During that time he has also been a hospitable fixture in the French Quarter. Shortly before Christmas, fire destroyed his house and contents while he was at work. The fund contributed to a fundraiser for Leroy.

Wilbert Jones was imprisoned for forty-five years before his overturned rape conviction last October. The intervention of the Innocence Project of New Orleans accomplished his

exoneration and located the guilty person as well. The fund helped Wilbert with some cash and personal items upon his release.

Arthur “Mr. Okra” Robinson was the last of New Orleans’ roving fruit and vegetable peddlers. Succeeding to his father’s practice, Mr. Okra slowly drove his truck loaded with fresh inventory through our streets chanting over a loud speaker: “I have oranges and bananas. I have eatin’ pears and apples, cantaloupe, greens, squash, and the mango.”

Mr. Okra’s truck was a total loss during Katrina and he was one of the first to receive aid from our fund.



MR. OKRA (JUNE 8, 1943-FEB. 15, 2018)

When news of his passing reached us, we learned that his family did not have the means to provide a proper funeral and burial. The fund contributed to a successful campaign to provide a first-class final arrangement including a Second Line for Mr. Okra.

Over the year we contributed to the following organizations:

- **NAMI St. Tammany** (a support group program for adults living with mental illness)
- **Boy’s and Girl’s Club** (filling the gap between school and home for at risk kids)
- **Unity of Greater New Orleans** (a faith, government, and business collaborative successfully reducing homelessness)
- **Baseball Miracles** (traveling baseball professionals introducing the sport and providing equipment to inner city kids.)
- **Northshore Food Bank** (distributes food to the needy and operates a thrift store and dental clinic)
- **Innocence Project of New Orleans** (IPNO provides legal support for the wrongly incarcerated)

- **Great Grant's Gift Foundation** (benefits underprivileged and disabled children by providing adaptive and academic aids)
- **S.T.O.P.S** (St. Tammany Outreach for the Prevention of Suicide)
- **Louisiana S.P.C.A** (a rejuvenated organization confronting homelessness and mistreatment of animals here)
- **Ozanam Inn Forgotten Angels** (a scholarship program for children of homeless families)

For all of 2017, contributions totaled \$34,279 and disbursements totaled \$27,200. Since inception post Katrina, the fund has distributed \$1,201,959 to charities and individuals. For that, as always, our deepest thanks.

With every good wish,

Tim