

## RV FUND LETTER DECEMBER 2021

*There is no past and no future; no one has ever entered those two imaginary kingdoms. There is only the present. — Leo Tolstoy*

The partners of Rice Voelker started our recovery fund in the days following Hurricane Katrina. That storm made landfall on August 29, 2005. Exactly sixteen year later, Hurricane Ida did the same with an analogous result.

Once again, the greatest havoc struck the most vulnerable members of the stricken communities. The improvement in emergency response fell well short of what was both needed and expected.

The slightly more westerly course of Ida, compared to Katrina, produced 150 mph winds at landfall in the parishes of Lafourche and Terrebonne. The trail of ruination that began in those two parishes continued through the River Parishes between New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

Now, almost five months past the storm, large numbers of residents in these areas are sleeping in tents, churches, and community centers. And just like the Katrina experience, our resources are far less than the needs that surround us.

The community of Galliano in Lafourche Parish bore the full weight of Ida and experienced vast destruction. Greg and Ann Sanamo own and operate a mobile home community there. The Sanamos also grow Louisiana Creole Tomatoes commercially.

After the storm, all of their residents were in severe need. Despite losing their entire tomato crop, the Sanamos generously waived two months' rent for their needy clients and cooked meals for them. The fund sent \$3000 to help purchase supplies and food for all of them. We also sent \$1000 to their tenants, the Martinez family, who were housing ten persons in a single mobile home during the emergency.

Lafourche Parish is also home to three Native-American tribes (The United Houma, Ponte-au-Chien, and Isle de Jean Charles). The fund sent \$500 to each to help in their rebuild.

The River Parishes (St. John, St. James, and St. Charles) border Lafourche to the North. The Mississippi River bisects all three. Opulent sugar plantations once occupied their banks and many residents are direct descendants of the slaves that toiled there.

The storm left the community of Edgard, parish seat of St. John Parish, with most of its 3000-person populace homeless. In late October residents were

still sleeping in tents or in the historic St John the Baptist Church. Edgard was still without running water and garbage collection.

The largely African-American citizenry there organized a volunteer effort to prepare meals and provide clothing and shelter for its neediest families. We made contact with one of the leaders of the effort and the fund sent \$3000 to assist them.

Genell Labranch is a retiree living with her disabled brother in the East St. John Parish community of LaPlace. When we reached Genell, they were living in her car after the storm battered their mobile home. The fund sent them \$1000 for a hotel room and travel expenses to Alabama. Relatives there are sheltering them until their promised FEMA trailer arrives.

The Fund has given to Habitat for Humanity since our inception. This year we helped Habitat recipient, Jerica Woods, a single mom who works as a Certified Nursing Assistant. She is now hopeful that replacing inflated rent payments with her Habitat home will make nursing school affordable for her.



THE WOODS FAMILY AT THEIR HOME SITE

Johnell Washington is an eighty-five-year-old retired construction worker. He lives alone in a modest home that he owns in downtown Covington. Ida's winds toppled a tree on his property that left a gaping hole in his roof. The fund sent Johnell \$1000 to assist him in getting emergency repairs.

If you were with us two years ago, you will remember Luke Bertel, a then 10-year-old student and all-star goalie on his school's lacrosse team. A diagnosis of acute myeloid leukemia upended the lives of Luke, his older sister, and single working mom. After two years of isolation and intense treatment that included chemotherapy and bone marrow transplants, Luke's doctors have said he is cancer free and have permitted his return to school.

The fund, along with school parents and teachers, provided intermittent financial help to the family while Luke's illness forced his mom to stay at home. She is now back at work and life is good for this deserving family.

The crisis in the New Orleans hospitality sector caused Cordelia Rogers to be furloughed from two jobs she held at downtown hotels. When the moratorium on rental evictions expired, her rent payments were in arrears resulting in her eviction. After securing permanent employment in the Clerk of Court's office, she found another apartment. The fund provided \$1000 to Cordelia for her security deposit.

This past year we continued our support of the four entities whose work, in service to the homeless and severely disadvantaged, we have long admired.

Last month the Ozanam Inn moved into its new building in the neighborhood of the New Orleans Veterans Medical Center. Many of the Inn's homeless clients are veterans who will benefit from both the location as well as the increased capacity to offer meals, clothing, and shelter.

We also continued support for Ozanam Inn's Forgotten Angels program that aids children in homeless families with its social programs and academic scholarships.

Unity of Greater New Orleans, a collaborative of sixty organizations working to end homelessness, has earned national recognition for its record of developing permanent low-cost housing and personal support for needy individuals and families.

The Harry Thomson Center is based at the Jesuit Church just outside of the French Quarter. The Center provides showers, meals, clothing, personal hygiene items, and counseling at no cost to all seeking assistance.

Pennies for Bread is an outreach of St. Joseph's Abbey in Covington. Throughout the year, the monks begin baking bread at midnight. Their van sets out before dawn to deliver fresh loaves to over fifty charitable locations providing meals for those in want. Recipient charities are inclusive of all denominations.

We continued our sponsorship of Innocence Project of New Orleans which freed five wrongly convicted individuals in 2021. Additionally, we provided some direct aid to recently freed IPNO clients facing hardship following Ida.

To date, lowernine.org has fully built ninety-one homes and completed renovations on over three hundred more in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. That organization, which had a modest beginning following Katrina, is now a leading factor in redevelopment of this still wounded neighborhood.

The fund has supported multiple charities dedicated to the care of animals. All do good work but Humane Society of Louisiana (HSLA) is our top pick. Rural Louisiana is mostly without any animal control and rescue capacity. The staff and volunteers of HSLA are always on call to respond at once to animals in distress due to neglect or cruelty.

In 2021 contributions to the fund totaled \$66,975.00 of which \$32,000.00 was from firm partners and \$34,975.00 from friends outside of the partnership. Since inception, distributions to needy families and charities serving them is now approaching \$1.4 million. Our present bank balance is \$12,394.95.

Our world now lives amidst warmer and more threatening weather. Storms are stronger, droughts last longer, floods are fiercer, and fires are more intense. We are aware that Louisiana does not stand alone in need of natural disaster relief. That is why your generosity means so much to all of us here.

The Dalai Lama's has said that his favorite prayer is

*"For as long as space endures, and for as long as living beings remain, until then may I too abide, to dispel the misery of the world."*

Thanks to your generosity, our fund has dispelled misery in small amounts by world count but often in large amounts to those receiving it. Once again please accept our deepest thanks for remembering us in your giving.

With our hope for your good health and happiness in 2022,

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