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Main Street volunteers from Nicholasville, Ky., unload supplies for Hurricane Katrina victims at a distribution center in Opelousas, La.

2006 MAIN STREET HERO AWARD

MAIN STREET COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY HURRICANE KATRINA AND THE MAIN STREET ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO RESPONDED WITH SUPPORT

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Its path of devastation stretched from Louisiana to Alabama and far north into Mississippi. Communities throughout the Gulf Coast region fought to survive the initial storm winds and tidal surge, and the subsequent aftermath of flooding. Some of the hardest-hit Main Street communities included Abbeville and Bogalusa in Louisiana, both of which had severe property damage; and Ocean Springs and Biloxi in Mississippi, where many of the historic buildings were sheared off their foundations.

Main Street organizations in the affected communities struggled to help downtown property owners save their buildings, merchants salvage their businesses, and residents find the goods and services they needed to rebuild their lives. Many local Main Street directors themselves were displaced. In Mississippi, Rebecca Davis, director of Pascagoula Main Street, along with half of her board of directors, lost their homes and businesses and are still living in trailers. Yet, they are actively working to secure funding and offer assistance to their local merchants, 40 percent of which have not reopened.

The day after the hurricane hit, the National Trust Main Street Center (NTMSC) staff experienced a surge of telephone calls and e-mails from the field expressing concern and seeking ways to help. This National Main Street Network of more than 1,800 commercial district revitalization professionals and organizations readily identified with their Main Street colleagues in the Gulf Coast region and sprang into action, moving on a peer-to-peer level to help.

Many Main Street communities in the region hosted evacuees. The population of towns like Picayune, Mississippi, doubled when displaced hurricane victims sought refuge. Main Street Director Reba Beebe continues to troubleshoot downtown traffic challenges and coordinate merchant services to host their new residents. Her job has been made a lot easier thanks to the quick response and continued commitment from Main Street communities like Richfield, Utah, and Beatrice, Nebraska.

Within days of the disaster, Nebraska Lied Main Street worked with Mississippi Main Street to match members of the

National Main Street Network with hurricane victims, encouraging Main Street organizations nationwide to adopt communities affected by the storm. Beatrice Main Street adopted Picayune, Mississippi. They held a fund raiser to send money and dispatched firemen, police officers, and electricians to help the ravaged community.

Kirkland and Walla Walla in Washington State organized Washington KAREs (Katrina Aide and Recovery Efforts) and adopted Pascagoula, Mississippi. They collected money and in-kind printing service donations from local merchants and residents to create a downtown gift certificate program, Pascagoula Dollars, that Pascagoula can use to encourage spending at its downtown businesses.

Other Main Street organizations outside of the region joined NTHP disaster response teams or initiated their own teams of professionals who traveled to the Gulf Coast to provide on-the-ground technical assistance. This spring, a team of 40 volunteers, sponsored by Main Street Oakland County, traveled to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where they worked with the Historic Downtown Hattiesburg Association to help clean up and stabilize the Old Hattiesburg High School in the downtown.

During the National Main Streets Conference held in New Orleans in June, 44 conference attendees participated in *Home Clean Out* volunteer work trips. The National Trust Main Street Center worked with the program coordinator ACORN to arrange for the volunteers and NTMSC staff to help New Orleans residents remove debris from their homes. An additional 58 conference attendees sponsored work trips with their monetary donations, which totaled \$870.

The strength of the Main Street network was evident in the way Gulf-region Main Street organizations and their managers rallied in the face of disaster and the response of their revitalization comrades who readily came forward to lend a hand. The National Trust for Historic Preservation recognized their collective efforts with its 2006 Main Street Hero Award.

There are many stories of survival and support. To learn more about the efforts of other 2006 Main Street Heroes, visit www.mainstreet.org/awards where you can download a synopsis of the stories that NTMSC has collected so far. To share your story, please e-mail mainstreet_awards@nthp.org.

A year later, many Main Street communities affected by the storm still need help – in-kind, technical, and monetary. To learn more about communities in need and how you or your organization can help, visit www.mainstreet.org.