

CityTeam and NARI Come to the Rescue Rebuilding in Gulf Coast

By **Wayne Baruch, CR**



During the week of November 10, 2008, Bucks-Mont Katrina Relief, in conjunction with CityTeam (cityteam.org), sponsored five member companies of the Central NJ Chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (cnjari.org): Megna Building and Remodeling, Bryhn Construction, United Windows, The Artisans Group and Billingham Built, plus eight other companies from PA and IL NARI for a week of rebuilding homes and a community food center from Bay St. Louis to Carriere, MS.

We met people who had experienced an extraordinary life-changing event by surviving Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Gustav, and in the process, remained grateful for the basics and showed tremendous resilience, as well as a proactive attitude which the rest of us should admire.

We met people whose homes had been swept away and who lost everything they owned, eaten in a soup kitchen, and lived in a tent for months before moving into a trailer where they still live three years later. This has put one's own problems in a new perspective: losing money in a 401K, having the garden eaten by deer, or having to put a beloved family pet on insulin, suddenly no longer seem to be the "crises" that they were before going to the Gulf!

While we saw many homes and other buildings that are once again habitable, the number that are still damaged was astounding. In many cases, all that remains in the home's former location are the posts that supported it up to 16 feet above the ground, or simply just a slab.

There were many sad stories. A former nurse was told that if she left the hospital as Katrina was approaching, she would no longer be allowed to work in any of the Gulf Coast states. Her children didn't

even know whether she was still alive. Fortunately, we were able to help this family and had time to repair the wraparound deck and a stair rail in their home that had been installed improperly. In another case, a retired police officer told us about the destruction of the home where he was born and raised. A group from the Central Jersey and the Bucks-Mont, PA, Chapter had rebuilt it in 2007.

At still another location where a home had been completely rebuilt, we trimmed the interior, hung doors, finished a deck and stairs and completed the finishing.

Artist Lori K. Gordon (lorikgordon@gmail.com) is a resident of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina upended her life. With her home, studio and all of her supplies washed away by the 35-foot storm surge and 150-mile per hour winds which obliterated her community, Gordon returned to work using the only materials which were available to her. Five weeks after the event, Gordon began collecting rubble and transforming it into works of art. She has received international recognition and national acclaim for "The





Katrina Collection,” which may be found in public and private collections around the world and has been featured on NPR’s *All Things Considered* and MSNBC.com’s series, *Rising from Ruin*. We spent nearly 800 hours bringing her new home closer to completion.

Again and again, we heard similar anecdotes and received such heartfelt gratitude that made all of us feel truly honored to be able to help these fellow Americans. This is what JFK meant by, “Ask not what your country can do for you...” and President Bush, Sr., meant by “1,000 points of light.”

CityTeam’s Disaster Response Team is based in Philadelphia, PA. Over the past three years, CityTeam has assisted in rebuilding over 200 homes on the Gulf Coast with the help of volunteer teams, like those from CJ, PA and Chicago NARI.

Even today, thousands of families are still without a place to call home. If you would like more information on how you can help, please visit the CityTeam website at www.cityteam.org and the American Red Cross at www.redcross.org/services/disaster/.

The Central Jersey Chapter of NARI is a not-for-profit trade association committed exclusively to the service of the professional remodeling industry, representing professional remodeling contractors, product manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, trade and consumer publications, utilities and lending institutions. In addition to representing the industry, NARI is a staunch ally of the nation’s homeowners.

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