

## Hundreds of Volunteers Needed in the Greater New Orleans Area

St. Bernard Parish Recovery Project in Louisiana has a tremendous need for volunteer support. This opportunity is being coordinated exclusively through St. Bernard Parish. Please see below for more details.

### Situation Background

St. Bernard Parish, located to the southeast of New Orleans, remains one of the most devastated communities in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. St. Bernard suffered significant structural damage to 100 percent of its residential and commercial units. Not only was it victim of torrential rain and winds, but a massive storm surge left nearly all of the parish inundated. The citizens of St. Bernard Parish need your help to recover.

### The Plan

The parish launched the St. Bernard Recovery Project on January 12th, 2006. The first phase will consist of volunteer teams of 10 entering flooded homes in order to salvage family treasures and remove debris (furniture, carpeting, sheetrock, etc.). Those homes still to be visited, already deemed structurally intact by the St. Bernard Parish Fire Department, number in the thousands. The second phase of the project, scheduled to begin when 5,000 homes have been cleaned of debris, will involve a partnership with the elderly, disabled, and single working parent households who have little means to rebuild.

Please note that this is not a Habitat for Humanity project. St. Bernard Parish is coordinating this effort. While this is so, without the prior support of thousands of committed Habitat volunteers, the project would never have come this far. However, there is a long way to go. Habitat for Humanity is one of several organizations that have been asked to make this opportunity known to its volunteers. This effort is being organized by St. Bernard Parish and Homeland Security professionals and will be one of the most comprehensive community recovery projects ever undertaken.

Those willing to donate their time and abilities are asked to commit for a minimum of six days. Volunteers arrive on Sundays for team assignment and OSHA-certified safety training, and work Monday through Friday during the cooler hours of the day. St. Bernard will house volunteers in Camp Hope and transport them from site to site. This volunteer base camp features 24-hour security, a medical tent, wireless Internet capability, satellite telephones, and shower and laundry facilities. Volunteers sleep in temperature-controlled classrooms with cots provided. In addition, the parish will provide three meals a day. A donation of \$100 per week is requested from each volunteer to help with food, electrical, and security costs. Those who cannot provide this requested donation will not be turned away.

St. Bernard Parish will coordinate the volunteer effort in removing health and safety hazards from homes and hauling the debris to the curb.

Committed volunteers must wear:

- \* Eye goggles
- \* Steel-toe boots with steel shanks (to protect soles from nails)
- \* Work gloves
- \* Volunteers should bring four pairs of work clothes.

In addition:

- \* Volunteers must have received tetanus vaccinations
- \* The EPA, the DEQ, the LDHH, and the ATSDR all require that volunteers wear N95 particulate respirators.

If you suffer from asthma, reactive airway disease, mold/spore allergies, a compromised immune system, or are pregnant, on steroids, undergoing chemotherapy, have leukemia, or are an organ transplant recipient, you will not be permitted to participate in debris removal.

The opportunities to work on this project will be great. There is a tremendous need for support. Officials have estimated needing at least 1,000 volunteers per week until the end of the summer. For every hour a volunteer works, the devastated, bankrupt parish can apply \$15 towards its reimbursement of the federal government. The parish is mainly blue collar, and each home that is cleaned of its debris saves the homeowner \$5,000-\$7,000. So many were without flood insurance, as the community is above sea level and not considered a part of the flood plain. Of the 67,000 residents, only 10,000 have been able to return. The parish government is operating with 50% of its staff, so the project is driven almost entirely by volunteers.

Your support is desperately needed. For many this has proved to be a life-changing experience. To call it humbling or eye-opening is an understatement.

If you are interested in volunteering, you can register for the St. Bernard Parish Recovery Project by going to the New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity website at [http://www.habitat-nola.org/st\\_bernard/](http://www.habitat-nola.org/st_bernard/). Any questions can be directed to Michael Hayes at the New Orleans affiliate, at (504) 861-2077 or [michaelh@habitat-nola.org](mailto:michaelh@habitat-nola.org).