

PROGRESS IN PLAQUEMINES PARISH

LDRF Grantee Brings Home Ownership to 48 Plaquemines Parish Residents

April 4th, 2009: For Plaquemines Parish residents like Anita, who had been living with 15 other people in a 2-bedroom trailer almost 200 miles away from her home, or her father who lived in the back of an 18-wheeler after the storms, or 12-year-old Gavin, whose long-term residence in a FEMA trailer caused frequent nosebleeds and headaches – this day couldn't come soon enough. Tension is high as 48 Plaquemines Parish residents and their families gather at the offices of Grace Harbor Ministries in Belle Chasse, Louisiana. Nearly 4 years after hurricane Katrina devastated this low-lying parish, these families are among nearly 7,000 who have been living in temporary housing or have not been able to return to the area. But today, that's about to change.



Mike Smith & his wife, Jane Bogart-Smith, lifelong residents of Plaquemines Parish, leaving the title signing as new homeowners. Photo by Jim Belfon.

Through an LDRF grant, Grace Harbor Ministries Technology & Economic Development Center provided gap-funding grants to Plaquemines Parish residents, enabling these 48 residents to become homeowners by providing assistance to purchase flood insurance, anchor the homes to safe foundations, and add wheelchair ramps or steps where required. **LDRF has invested a total of \$576,000 in the project;** approximately 65 additional residents are slated to receive gap-grants over the next couple of months (contingent upon FEMA's scheduled release of the homes), which will enable them to become homeowners, as well. The quality of the manufactured homes, anchored to strong foundations, is such that HUD and other accredited financial institutions recognize the homes as assets that will appreciate in value, thus creating opportunities for asset development in low-wealth communities in Plaquemines Parish.

Mike Smith and his wife, Jane Bogart-Smith (pictured left) are eager to make their new home their own. Following Katrina, Jane salvaged materials from their ruined home that she plans to re-use as decorative elements in the new home.

Reflecting on the wide scope of services that Grace Harbor Ministries Technology & Economic Development center has provided since the storm, Jane remarks that, "We've met wonderful people and volunteers who helped us remove debris and brought us water and hot meals. Some assistance providers make you feel like you're substandard, but with Grace Harbor, you always feel welcome, regardless of color. Their generosity made us want to do more to help others, as well. **We don't know where we'd be now without Grace Harbor's help.**"

Longtime resident Mona Boutwell is also glad to be coming home. Her 2 sons miss the hunting, fishing and football games with friends that they enjoyed as Plaquemines residents. And with the school system struggling to recovery, **Mona explains, "I feel like my work as a teacher, especially as a science teacher, is needed to help the schools come back, to help other families come back."** Helping these 48

Parish residents return to their hometowns as homeowners not only ensures their right of return, but also opens the door for other displaced residents by establishing the secure population base that will support the infrastructure necessary to facilitate the return of those still waiting to come home.

Something for the Children: LDRF Grantee Completes 2nd of 5 Parks in Plaquemines Parish

June 5, 2009: Parish President Billy Nungesser, Council Chair Lynda Banta, Parish D.A. Charles Ballay, along with funders and dozens of residents came out to celebrate the opening of the Buras park. The



Buras children (and a couple of grown-ups!) try out the new water park on opening day.
Photo by Jim Belfon

LDRF has contributed \$1.14M in funding for the 5 parks to be completed throughout Plaquemines Parish. Emily Campbell, Exexutive Director of Project Rebuild Plaquemines, explains that her passion for the parks grew from her observation that, amidst the trauma of losing homes and jobs, children's recovery needs were not being adequately addressed. **"This lets the children know that they are important, too,"** says Campbell.

2nd of 5 parks that Project Rebuild Plaquemines has slated for the recovery of the hurricane-ravaged parish, the Buras park features a walking trail, shelters, picnic areas, barbeque pits, Evos!© playground equipment and, the highlight for many kids, a mini water park – just in time for the sweltering Louisiana summer! The park features commemorative elements, as well. **A row of palms cuts through the park, memorializing Katrina's path through the parish.** A play fire truck with the #42 emblazoned on its side pays tribute to a Plaquemines fire fighter who lost his life while working to secure safety for his community during Katrina.



Young Plaquemines resident hangs out on the new Evos! play equipment.
Photo by Jim Belfon

For more information on Project Rebuild and the 1st park opening:

<http://www.louisianahelp.org/documents/plaqueminesparkboothvillestory.pdf>