

## **Welcome to New Orleans**

The First Unitarian Universalist Church of New Orleans sits in an area known as Uptown. This area is upriver of the city and includes residential neighborhoods as well as commercial businesses, universities, churches and the Audubon Zoo and Park.

In the immediate vicinity, you'll find some nice places to eat, grocery stores "to make groceries" as we say in New Orleans, music venues and entertainment at several universities. There are also drugstores and medical centers nearby. The nearest coffee shops, grocery store and restaurants are straight down Jefferson to Magazine Street and over to Napoleon down Claiborne.

### **Area Restaurants**

Almost all restaurants are now open, but to check visit:

[http://neworleansonline.com/neworleans/cuisine/restaurant\\_listings.html](http://neworleansonline.com/neworleans/cuisine/restaurant_listings.html).

### **Area Grocery Stores**

Whole Foods Market

5600 Magazine St.

New Orleans, LA 70115

(504) 899-9119, [www.wholefoods.com](http://www.wholefoods.com)

Store hours:

9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday–Saturday

9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday

Wal-Mart Supercenter Store

1901 Tchoupitoulas St.

New Orleans, LA 70130

(504) 522-4142

Call for hours – subject to change.

Crescent City Farmers Market

9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesday, Broadway Avenue side of Uptown Square (closest to church)

8 a.m. to noon Saturday at Magazine and Girord streets

[www.crescentcityfarmersmarket.org](http://www.crescentcityfarmersmarket.org)

## **Medical facilities**

NOLA Hospitals open 24 hours a day (as of spring, 2006):

1) Alton Ochsner Foundation Hospital  
1514 Jefferson Highway  
New Orleans  
504-842-3000, [www.ochsner.org](http://www.ochsner.org)

2) Children's Hospital  
200 Henry Clay Ave.  
New Orleans

3) Army Combat Support Hospital  
Convention Center  
Henderson Street Entrance

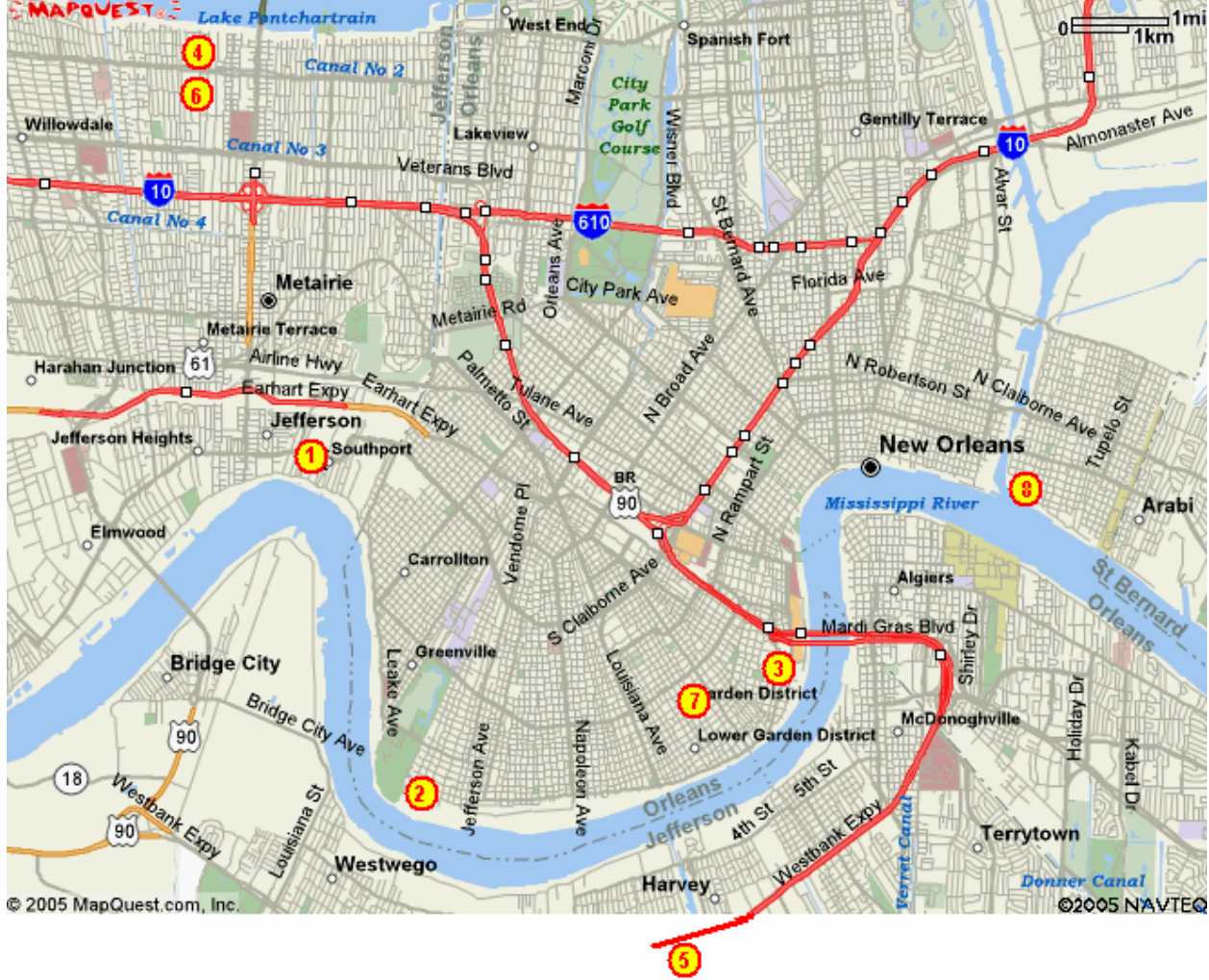
4) East Jefferson General Hospital  
4200 Houma Blvd..  
Metairie  
504-454-4000

5) West Jefferson General Hospital  
1101 Medical Center Blvd  
Marrero  
504-347-5511

6) Lakeside Hospitals  
4700 South I-10 Service Rd  
Metairie  
504-780-8282

7) Touro Infirmary Hospital  
1401 Foucher  
New Orleans  
504-897-7011, [www.touro.com](http://www.touro.com)

8) USS Comfort  
600 Poland Ave.



**City of New Orleans - Hospitals Reported to be Open  
24 hours a day by the City Government**

New Orleans

**Pharmacies**

Walgreen's  
 5300 Tchoupitoulas  
 New Orleans, LA 70115  
 (Take Jefferson St. to Tchoupitoulas and turn left)  
 (504) 899-0022 (504) 899-0034  
 Store Hours:  
 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday-Saturday  
 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday

Rite Aid  
 7133 St. Charles Ave.  
 New Orleans, LA 70118  
 (St. Charles Avenue at Broadway)  
 (504) 861-3638  
 Pharmacy is closed

Store Hours:

8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Saturday

8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday

Castellon Pharmacy

8232 Oak St.

New Orleans, LA

(Claiborne to Carrollton, turn left, then right on Oak)

(504) 866-3784

### **Places to shop/eat**

The closest shopping districts are Magazine Street, the university areas and the Riverbend/Carrollton area.

If you drive down Jefferson Street toward the river for about a mile, you'll hit Magazine, a long street filled with antique and vintage clothing stores, restaurants and po-boy spots, coffee shops and art galleries. You can go in either direction to find lots of fun things to do. For a full list, visit [www.magazinestreet.com](http://www.magazinestreet.com). For an article on Magazine Street since Katrina, visit <http://travelagewest.com/articles.aspx?article=5111>.

If you drive down Jefferson toward the river and take a right at St. Charles Avenue (before Magazine), you'll pass Tulane and Loyola universities, which have student unions and lecture halls on their campuses. At Broadway, turn right and find restaurants, bars and coffeeshops. (If you continue down Broadway, you'll end up at Claiborne Avenue where, if you take a right, you'll be back at the church.)

If you drive down Jefferson, turn right on to St. Charles Avenue and continue *past* Broadway, you'll hit the Riverbend area when the Mississippi River (which runs parallel to St. Charles) literally bends and St. Charles becomes Carrollton Avenue (you'll actually turn right at this point). On Carrollton Avenue you'll find restaurants, banks, coffeeshops, clothing stores and more. On Oak Street, on the left side of Carrollton about a mile up from St. Charles, are more nightclubs and restaurants, some acclaimed, some famous. On the right side of Carrollton is Maple Street, which has stores, restaurants and a wonderful bookstore named Maple Street Books.

## **Music hotspots**

For a list of open clubs, visit <http://neworleansonline.com>. For a weekly listing of bands and nightclubs, pick up Gambit New Orleans, a free weekly found most everywhere, or Lagniappe, the Friday entertainment section of The Times-Picayune (See “Cultchuch” below on how to pronounce that). A monthly magazine dedicated to New Orleans music, also free on the streets, is Offbeat, and it’s on the Web at [www.offbeat.com](http://www.offbeat.com).

## **Climate**

South Louisiana is a coastal climate and humidity is an understatement. The winters are short and mild and the spring and fall delightful. The summer, unfortunately, can sometimes be a long steamy hot four to six months. This is the kind of humidity where you take a shower, emerge outside and get wet all over again.

Rainfall hits about 60 inches a year for New Orleans. Hard rainstorms can deliver several inches within a few hours! Summertime means daily thunderstorms off the Gulf. Wait 20 minutes and they are usually gone and the sun reappears. Be sure and carry umbrellas with you everywhere. If lightning happens (and it should), take cover.

If you’re working in the summer, please take precautions. Try to work in early and late afternoons-evenings to avoid the hot part of the day. Drink lots of water, since you will sweat a lot in the excessive humidity. Watch out for sunstroke; wear appropriate hats and clothes to keep cool and the sun off your face.

If you’re working in the winter, chances are it will be damp and cool with stretches reaching down to freezing and below. Wear clothes in layers. It’s not unusual for winter weather to be spring-like in the morning and close to snow in the afternoon. Cold fronts move in fast and bring drastic temperature changes and sometimes violent weather. Get used to those beeping noises on your TV that the weather service issues.

Spring and fall are the best times to visit New Orleans. However, drastic temperature changes can still occur, as well as stormy weather. It’s best to bring all kinds of clothes, wear them in layers and adjust accordingly.

## **Sightseeing**

Tourism was the *huge* industry in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina. Now, local businesses and restaurants are suffering from the decrease in visitors. Visiting local landmarks and tourist attractions is actually a form of recovery assistance, so be sure and see why New Orleans was once described as “America’s Most Interesting City.”

For a list of what tourist sites are open, visit <http://neworleansonline.com>.

## **Our “Cultchuch”**

We talk funny down here and it’s not what you typically see on TV and in the movies. Those sultry, thick Southern accents really belong in places like Mississippi, Atlanta and Virginia. Some New Orleanians have what we call a “Yat” accent, which sounds more like Brooklyn than Baton Rouge. No one really knows why people here sound like New York, but some suggest it may be because the same groups of immigrants that came through New York also came through New Orleans. From 1890 to around 1950, for instance, the largest group of immigrants coming into New Orleans were from Sicily (one of the reasons we have such amazing Italian food).

Some words and expressions you’ll hear only here in New Orleans are:

- Neutral Ground – The medians here are called neutral grounds because when the Americans took over Louisiana in 1803, the citizens of French and Spanish descent didn’t want them living with them in the French Quarter. The Americans settled upriver of the old town, on the opposite side of Canal Street. The median down the center of Canal was called the “neutral ground” because that was where the two opposing cultures met.
- Making Groceries – We say this because it is the literal English translation from the French “faire son marche,” meaning to buy one’s groceries.
- Yeah Ya Right – Means cool, OK, I hear ya.
- New Orleans – It’s pronounced New Or-lee-ans or New Awlans, *NOT* New Orleans or N’awlins.
- Po-Boys – New Orleans’ signature sandwich. For you Yankees, it’s pretty much a submarine sandwich or hoagie, except it’s much better! Here, you’ll find fried shrimp, roast beef dripping in gravy and fresh fried oysters inside real French bread, among many other wonderful items. It’s called a po-boy

because it was created during a streetcar strike many years ago and advertised for those not having much money.

- Dressed – If you want lettuce and tomato on your po-boy, you want it “dressed.” Usually natives will ask, “You want that dressed, dawlin’?”
- Muffaletto – Another signature sandwich of New Orleans, this one invented by our Italian population and features slices of Italian meats topped with a special olive salad and served on round Italian bread. Central Grocery in the French Quarter is known as the originator of this delectable sandwich and they are always delicious in this ethnic grocery store. Best eaten with a Barq’s root beer or a beer.
- Lagniappe – This literally means “a little something extra.” When shopping, a merchant might put lagniappe in your bag or the baker might toss in an extra doughnut to the dozen. It’s pronounced “lan (rhymes with ran) -yap.” In Cajun country, where they know French better than we do, they pronounce it “lan (rhymes with Don) -yap.”
- As for our French streets, we say those rather oddly as well. Burgundy is pronounced “Bur-gun-DEE” and Esplanade rhymes with lemonade. Hey, it’s been a long time since the French were here.

## Natives

New Orleans residents have lost a huge piece of their lives. In addition to their possessions, homes and neighborhoods, their city is in ruins in so many areas. They love to tell their “storm stories” and they love to see tourists and volunteers visiting. Don’t be shy. Say hello, tell them where you’re from and why you’re here. It will make their day. Don’t be surprised if you get hugged.

## Safety Issues

New Orleans has many safety issues following the hurricanes. They are mold, possible toxins in the homes and ground, debris throughout the city that offers a myriad of problems and the lack of usual medical care and police protection.

Government agencies and the American Red Cross suggest:

- **When entering buildings, use extreme caution.** Watch carefully every step you take, looking for loose wires and exposed nails, among other dangers.
- **Wear sturdy shoes.** The most common injury following a disaster is cut feet.
- **Don’t drink the water inside a damaged home.** Unless the owner tells you otherwise, it’s best to drink bottled water.

- **Wear protection around mold.** Many kinds of fungi, including mildew and molds, flourish following flooding. Inhaling molds from building materials, decaying vegetation, waste material and other fungus-contaminated debris can cause sickness in cleanup workers.
- **If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and quickly leave the building.** Alert your team leader and/or site manager.
- **Be suspect around power lines.** Always assume they are energized. Avoid all containers. Let the owner handle these. Use your eyes to look for loose wiring. If you are not a trained electrician, DO NOT TOUCH exposed wiring or electrical equipment.
- **If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires,** or if you smell burning insulation, alert your team leader and/or site manager.
- **Check for sewage and waterline damage.** If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and tell the owner.
- **Watch out for animals, especially poisonous snakes, that may have come into buildings with the floodwaters.** Use a stick to poke through debris. Floodwaters flush snakes and many animals out of their homes. Use bug spray as well, and watch for fire ants, wasps, bees and spiders.
- **Watch for loose plaster, drywall and ceilings that could fall.**
- **Chainsaws are one of the most dangerous power tools used during cleanup.** Always wear proper safety equipment, learn to safely operate the saw and keep it in good working condition.
- **Drink lots of water and wear hats.** Summers on the Gulf Coast are very hot and humid. Take salt pills if necessary. Avoid caffeinated beverages. Take plenty of breaks and rest in shade.
- **Trip & fall hazards.** Before you walk in a new area, use your eyes to look for potential trip and fall hazards. Either GO AROUND the hazards (use another path) or remove the hazard.
- **Security and situational awareness – stay in groups.** Do not venture off alone. Check in with team leader regularly and never leave a work team without permission from the group leader.

## Rules of the house

1. Always respect each other.
2. Bring out what you bring in.
3. Keep noise levels low when people are sleeping – again, respect your roommates.

4. Clean up after yourself. Leave the area clean and sanitary for the next person.
5. Place all trash in outside receptacles when you are about to leave.
6. Do not eat other people's food without asking first.
7. No smoking inside the building.

## **Bathroom Schedules**

Because there are limited bathrooms at the church, we ask that schedules be made by the team leaders for both shower times and early morning bathroom use.

Volunteers will have a designated time for showers, keeping them short when there are many people waiting. It's imperative that individuals stick to their time slot so that everyone can shower at a decent time of day. Depending on the number of men and women volunteers, shower schedules may be arranged by gender.

In the morning, please stick to your schedule as well, limiting bathroom time to a minimum.

## **Evacuations**

Because of the fragile nature of New Orleans, the city will declare mandatory evacuations of hurricanes approaching Louisiana. Be prepared to leave the city should this occur. The Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge will help with your evacuation, but please bring bedding, water and food with you.

You should:

1. **Travel by car, when possible** so that you can evacuate easily and independently. Be sure to gas up early and leave with a full tank.
2. **Bring all of your items with you.** This includes clothes, bedding, personal items and perishables. If New Orleans remains closed for an extended period of time, this will allow you to fly out of Baton Rouge or another city (should the evacuation head in another direction).
3. **Bring a first aid kit** if you have one with you. This does not mean that you will be expected to perform medical duties in the shelter, but rather

that you would be capable of handling small problems that you or your friends may encounter.

4. **Bring all of your bottled water with you.** Store it in sealed, unbreakable containers.
5. **Bring all of your food with you.** A supply of non-perishable packaged or canned food is best. If you are buying items before evacuating, select foods that require no refrigeration and little or no water. For example, energy bars, ready-to-eat soup, peanut butter, etc.
6. **Don't forget your medications.**
7. **Bring a battery-operated radio if you have one with you.** Pick up extra batteries.
8. **Bring personal items** such as toilet paper, towelettes, tampons/pads, hand sanitizer and personal hygiene items such as toothbrush, etc.
9. **Carry cash.** ATM cards might not work if the power is out, so retrieve cash early on.
10. **Carry contact information.** Carry a current list of family phone numbers and email addresses. You may not be able to charge your cell phone, so be sure to have a hard copy of numbers of important friends and family.
11. **Bring a map.** Of at least the state — consider marking an evacuation route on it. For New Orleans' recommended evacuation route, go to [http://www.ohsep.louisiana.gov//evacinfo/no\\_contraflow.htm](http://www.ohsep.louisiana.gov//evacinfo/no_contraflow.htm)

### **A First Aid Kit should include:**

- Sterile band aids in assorted sizes
- 2-inch & 3-inch sterile gauze pads
- Hypoallergenic adhesive tape
- Triangular bandages
- 2-inch & 3-inch sterile roll bandages
- Scissors
- Tweezers
- Needle
- Safety razor blade
- Bar of soap
- Moistened towelettes
- Antiseptic spray
- Thermometer
- Tongue blades and wooden applicator sticks
- Tube petroleum jelly or other lubricant
- Safety pins in assorted sizes

- Cleansing agent/soap
- Latex gloves
- 1st Aid Reference Guide

## **Book and Film Recommendations on Hurricanes Katrina & Rita by Cheré Coen, HRSJP Volunteer Coordinator**

To get an excellent overview of what happened in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, including issues such as racism, classism, political bipartisanship and environmental neglect, see the Spike Lee's **"When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts"** (HBO Documentary Films). It's a four-hour documentary but worth every minute. It's safe to say this is the most definitive work on the disaster yet made on film. For information, a preview and airing times on HBO, visit [www.hbo.com/docs/programs/whentheleveesbroke](http://www.hbo.com/docs/programs/whentheleveesbroke).

New Orleans Times-Picayune Metro Editor Jed Horne, a 2005 Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for his coverage of Katrina, has written **"Breach of Faith, Hurricane Katrina and the Near Death of a Great American City"** (\$25.95, Random House, 2006). The book not only covers the disaster and its aftermath, but features wonderful stories of the people who survived the storm.

**"The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast"** by Douglas Brinkley (HarperCollins, \$29.95, 2006). Brinkley's book is one of the first to be published about the disaster and features dozens of first-person accounts of the tragedy. There are many stinging political stabs in this book and a few minor errors, but overall it's a massive, impressive book. For more of a balanced look at the storm, try Jed Horne's "Breach of Faith."

**"The Ravaging Tide: Strange Weather, Future Katrinas, and the Coming Death of America's Coastal Cities"** by Mike Tidwell (Free Press, \$24. 2006). The author of "Bayou Farewell," Tidwell maintains his diagnosis that global warming, environmental destruction by the oil and gas industries and the levee systems by the Corps of Engineers is destroying Louisiana's coastline, making the state susceptible to more Katrinas. Fixing the levees addresses the symptoms, Tidwell said, but not the cancer that is coastal erosion and global warming.

Wall Street Journal reporters Christopher Cooper and Robert Block have published an account of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, but this one focuses primarily on the bungled relief efforts of the federal government.

**"Disaster, Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security"** (Times

Books, \$26) chronicles the FEMA debacle that led to thousands of people not being rescued from the floodwaters in the days immediately following the storm's landfall. All cities are equally unprotected, the authors insist.

Times-Picayune Pulitzer-Prize winning reporters Mark Schleifstein and John McQuaid, have coauthored **“Path of Destruction: The Devastation of New Orleans and the Coming Age of Superstorms”** (Little, Brown & Co., \$25.99). The duo were part of the Picayune's special coverage of “Washing Away,” a series of articles the newspaper published a few years ago that predicted a catastrophic hurricane overwhelming New Orleans's levees. Schleifstein's stories on Katrina were among those honored with 2006 Pulitzer Prizes to the Times-Picayune for Public Service and Breaking News Reporting.

**“Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and Natural, Racial and Economic Disasters”** by Michael Eric Dyson (Basic Civitas Books \$23) offers a searing assessment of Hurricane Katrina in terms of race. Dyson provides the historical context of race issues in New Orleans in relation to Hurricane Katrina, offering personal interviews from those who survived the storm. According to the publicity material on this book, “despite the cries of outrage that have mounted since the levees broke, we have failed to confront the disaster's true lesson: to be poor, or black, in today's ownership society, is to be left behind.”

**“Americans at Risk: Why We Are Not Prepared for Megadisasters and What We Need to Do Now”** by Dr. Irwin Redlener (Knopf, \$24), founder and director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness, claims we are not prepared as a nation for megadisasters such as hurricanes Katrina and Rita. He brings his years of experience with disasters and health care crises to this analysis of our nation's approach to disaster readiness — or lack of.

**“Geographies of New Orleans, Urban Fabrics Before the Storm”** by Richard Campanella (Center for Louisiana Studies, \$49.50) is an encyclopedia of geography knowledge about everything New Orleans, from ethnic neighborhoods and settlement patterns to what the Yellow Pages says about the city. Equally fascinating is his first-person account of riding out Hurricane Katrina in his 9<sup>th</sup> Ward house and experiencing the city during the fateful week that followed.

**“The Storm: What Went Wrong and Why During Hurricane Katrina — The Inside Story From One Louisiana Scientist”** by Ivor Van Heerden and Mike Bryan looks at Hurricane Katrina from a scientific point-of-view, particularly

on the failure of the levee system. Van Heerden was seen many times on television as co-director of the LSU Hurricane Center.

If fiction is more your style of learning, try “**Tubby Meets Katrina**” by Tony Dunbar, a New Orleans lawyer who sets his recurring character in New Orleans after the storm.

**Other books include:**

“Hurricane Katrina: An American Tragedy and Its Aftermath“ by Time Magazine.

“Hurricane Katrina: CNN Presents: State of Emergency“ by CNN News with an introduction by Ivor Van Heerden.

“Hurricane Katrina: The First Seven Days” by D.M. Brown.

“Katrina: Stories of Rescue, Recovery and Rebuilding in the Eye of the Storm“ by The Associated Press, Susan M. Moyer, editor.

“Hurricane Katrina: Through the Eyes of Storm Chasers“ by Jim Reed and Mike Theiss.

“Through the Eye of the Storm” by Cholene Espinoza.

“On Risk and Disaster: Lessons from Hurricane Katrina“ by Ronald J. Daniels, Howard Kunreuther and Donald J. Kettl, editors.

“The Storm: Students of Biloxi, Mississippi, Remember Hurricane Katrina” (Charlesbridge, \$9.95), compiled by Barbara Barbieri McGrath.

## **Now showing at the Aquarium of the Americas:**

'Hurricane' witnesses theory turning into reality

By JOHN WIRT, Movie critic

Published: Aug 31, 2006, The Advocate, Baton Rouge

In the waning days of August, 2005, producer-director Greg MacGillivray was editing Hurricane Warning, his recently wrapped film project. A movie about the devastation a major hurricane can cause now that so much of Louisiana's storm-surge-absorbing coastal wetlands have slipped into the Gulf of Mexico, Hurricane Warning took a sudden turn on Aug. 29, the day Hurricane Katrina turned possibility into reality.

After the storm, Hurricane Warning became Hurricane on the Bayou. The IMAX film had its premiere Tuesday at the Entergy IMAX Theatre in New Orleans.

A year ago as Katrina approached the Gulf Coast, MacGillivray tracked the storm from his office in Laguna Beach, Calif. The Oscar-nominated filmmaker considered sending a crew back to Louisiana prior to the hurricane's landfall, but decided to wait. His team left a few days after the storm passed, hauling four IMAX cameras, water, gasoline, food, sleeping bags and tents. The team and a rented helicopter from Miami met at Houma's airport. MacGillivray stayed behind in Laguna Beach because he was contracted to begin another IMAX project in the Swiss Alps.

In the days following the storm, MacGillivray was unable to reach anyone at the Audubon Nature Institute in New Orleans. Audubon co-produced the film with the help of funding from the state of Louisiana. MacGillivray sent his crew to New Orleans anyway, taking a personal financial risk.

"From a business standpoint, this was probably a really stupid thing to do," the producer-director said in New Orleans this week. "I didn't know if the Audubon wanted to go ahead with the film. The scenario that everyone was worried about had actually happened."

In the event Audubon decided to cancel the film, MacGillivray hoped he could finish it on his own.

“The right thing to do was to come down here and try to get good footage of the disaster,” he said. “I took that gamble.”

MacGillivray gave his crew in Louisiana instructions about what and where to film. Once the nine-member team reached New Orleans, 80 percent of which was underwater, it found itself in something close to a war zone.

“They arrived when there was all that hullabaloo about helicopters getting shot at and people with guns in the streets,” MacGillivray recalled. “That was tremendously exaggerated. Nevertheless, everyone was concerned about the wellbeing of our crew, as were the crew members, too. It was guerilla filmmaking.”

MacGillivray communicated with his team in Louisiana via satellite phone. The filmmakers relied on battery-powered radios for news of the crisis.

“We trucked in all the equipment we needed,” the director said. “We knew it was gonna work and every night all the batteries were charged by the generators.”

Flooding complicated shooting on the ground, but the filmmakers had no trouble getting through military roadblocks. They hung signs on their trucks identifying their project’s association with the Audubon Nature Institute and the state of Louisiana.

MacGillivray is pleased with the footage his crew got in the days following the storm. IMAX images provide clarity and scale beyond the reach of ordinary TV cameras, he said.

“You can shoot very wide shots that give you a sense of really being there and seeing the vastness of the damage and flooding,” he said.

Having obtained real images of storm and flood damage, the filmmakers scratched plans for computer-generated simulations. The script, written by Louisiana filmmaker Glen Pitre, was adjusted, too, adding real events to the stories of four musicians: Cajun blues-rocker Tab Benoit; 14-year-old fiddler-singer Amanda Shaw; New Orleans songwriter-pianist Allen Toussaint; and zydeco musician Chubby Carrier. The musicians form a human focus within the film’s big picture of wetlands loss and hurricane destruction.

“New Orleans is so connected to music, and that’s such a distinction of this region,” the producer-director said. “The four musicians make a little more interesting story than if we had a carpenter or a fisherman.”

It was eerie and frightening to witness real-life devastation of the kind he’d originally intended to dramatize through special effects, MacGillivray added.

“My partners here at the Audubon Institute, seeing them lose their homes and relocate, all the heartache that everyone has gone through down here, we’ve felt that every step of the way.”

Benoit, who appears in and narrates much of Hurricane on the Bayou, saw the film for the first time last week with a preview audience including MacGillivray and the Audubon Nature Institute staff.

“It’s heavy duty,” Benoit said. “It’s covering things that people keep forgetting, like why did this happen and what we have to do to stay here (in south Louisiana). It comes down to protection. You cannot only rely on levees. I don’t care how strong or big a levee is, it can’t hold the Gulf of Mexico back.”

Benoit, the founder of Voice of the Wetlands, a grassroots organization that advocates wetlands preservation and restoration, knows wetlands loss firsthand. Hurricane Rita, for instance, obliterated his camp on Bayou Delarge.

“This is my home, it’s my inspiration,” Benoit said. “I learned about life and God and the Earth from living in this environment. I want to see that continue so my son will be able to experience the same thing.

“We can’t destroy the marshes just to get oil and gas out of them. Everything here is for us to use, not abuse. When we abuse those privileges, it kicks us in the butt. We just had a great opportunity to learn that lesson and we better learn it now.”

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### **Hurricane on the Bayou**

**WHEN:** Shown daily

**WHERE:** Entergy IMAX Theatre (New Orleans) at the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas (Canal Street at the Mississippi River)

**ADMISSION:** \$8 Seniors \$7, children 2-12 \$5

TICKETS: (504) IMAX-4629 or (800) 774-7394



Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge member Irene Kato, left, and former UCBR member Carol Kelly of Seattle, right, worked on the house of Danielle Vockroth, a member of Community Church UU of New Orleans. (Michael J. Hebert)

## **UU Weekend Warriors take on New Orleans**

Baton Rouge UU group makes monthly visits to help clean up.

By Donald E. Skinner

8.29.06, UU World magazine

When the call went out for volunteers last fall after hurricanes Katrina and Rita roared through New Orleans, a group of men and women from the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge were among the first to step forward.

The group became known as the Weekend Warriors. Since November they have made nine trips to New Orleans, or about one a month. The group helps individual members of the three New Orleans-area Unitarian Universalist congregations put

their lives back together. The warriors have cleared vegetation and downed trees from yards, removed water heaters and other debris, made repairs to floors and windows, moved furniture, erected fencing, help gut houses, hauled building materials, and washed sidewalks and sides of buildings.

The leader of the warriors is Michael Hebert, an air pollution consultant. Asked why he volunteered for the group, he quoted the Sufi poet, Rumi: "Love is the religion and the universe is the book." He added, "It's all about compassion. Everyone on earth deserves a fair shake."

Shannon Cavell, the Baton Rouge congregation's president and a warriors member, made the first trip to New Orleans in November, helping salvage belongings from the flooded Community Church UU. The next month the warriors made another trip—and then another.

On each trip the warriors work on three to four projects. They've helped about 15 families in total. "These folks are still struggling every day just to get by and we figure it's the least we can do to help wherever we can," said Hebert. "We're not trying to help all of humanity, just one person or family at a time."

The warriors are a group of about 24; five to ten members make each trip to New Orleans. There are homemakers, lawyers, computer technicians, a veterinarian, agricultural and environmental consultants, an engineer, a physician, a journalist, a social worker, and a working and a retired nurse.

"The whole reason why we can do this is our location," said Hebert. "It takes us a little more than an hour to get into the city and then we can put in an 8- to 10-hour workday and come home again." For many months volunteers from farther away found it difficult to volunteer because there was no place for them to stay in New Orleans. "We're self-contained," he said, "so we didn't have that problem."

And there's more to these trips than simply physical labor. "The other way we help is simply by listening to people," he explained. "We might be cutting down a tree for someone, but while we're doing that we're talking to them and listening to their frustrations and their plans. We help them celebrate their small victories and commiserate about their losses." Most of the time, he said, the homeowners are out there working alongside the warriors.

Hebert doesn't see an end to the warriors' trips. He said the group helped one Ninth Ward member, Augusta Butler, finish the gutting of her house, and is

teaming with a program run by the Episcopal Church to gut another house for a First Unitarian Church of New Orleans member, Rita Hubbard. He is also lining up opportunities for members of his congregation to work with other groups in New Orleans.

Conditions are still pretty primitive in some areas of the city, Hebert said, choking up as he described what the city looked like back in November and December and how little some areas have changed. "People who live there," he said, "have to face the insanity every day of piles of trash, no city services, fighting with insurance companies, whether there will be another hurricane, and if so, will the levees hold."

Irene Kato has been on four warrior trips to New Orleans. "I just wanted to help people get their lives back in order," she said. "At first I didn't know what to expect. I thought I had to be Wonder Woman, but I found that just doing a small task means so much to people. I spent a day pulling tall weeds out of a woman's yard and she was so grateful. She said that just the fact that we were there helping was inspiration enough for her to do more on her own."

"Another time," she said, "I hung blinds in a man's house. It was just a small thing, but he was so excited. He said, 'Now I can dance in my living room again.'"

Rita Hubbard, a member of Community Church UU in New Orleans, lost most of the contents of her house to flooding. The warriors arranged for the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge's senior youth group to come help her for a day. The warriors themselves will follow up with a workday on August 26 to start gutting her house.

"People from the church have just been a godsend," said Hubbard. "They helped us clean out the house, including finding some valuables that we'd not had time to get to." Hubbard has been living in Houston since Katrina, but still supports Community Church. "I hope to move back but I don't know yet if that will be possible," she said. "But people like the Weekend Warriors help make that more of a reality."

## **State maps plan for coastal projects**

### **Billions of dollars of levees, dikes urged**

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**By Mark Schleifstein, Times-Picayune**

State officials unveiled a sweeping plan Wednesday that they say will protect New Orleans and other south Louisiana communities from major hurricanes while rebuilding coastal wetlands. If implemented, the plan would dramatically change the shape of the state's coastline at a cost estimated to reach the tens of billions of dollars.

The plan, a draft to be officially released Nov. 29, represents the state's first concrete statement on the array of massive engineering projects -- such as levees, dikes and freshwater diversions -- that officials believe it will take to save the state's coastline and protect hundreds of thousands of South Louisiana residents from future storms. Once finalized, the proposal will form the baseline for an extensive lobbying campaign by the state -- one likely to stretch on for years -- to wrest from Washington the billions needed to finance the work.

Though many individual projects in the plan have been debated for years, state officials have now pulled them together in an ambitious proposal that underscores the urgency of the Herculean task at hand. State officials laid out the plan Wednesday in detailed maps presented to the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority.

#### **Among the highlights of the plan's recommendations:**

-- A floodgate at the Rigolets, near Slidell, and a dike stretching southwest from there down the middle of Lake Borgne to Proctor's Point in St. Bernard Parish. The intent would be to protect New Orleans and communities fronting on Lake Pontchartrain from catastrophic storm surge.

-- Essentially abandoning much of Lower Plaquemines Parish for the sake of protecting areas farther up river. The state proposal calls for slicing Plaquemines into three levels of levee protection, with only the areas closest to New Orleans receiving "Category 5" protection; areas between Oak Grove and Myrtle Grove receiving protection from a 100-year hurricane; and areas to the south of that receiving no greater protection than existed before Hurricane Katrina.

-- Closing the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet, or MR-GO, the controversial 76-mile shipping channel that connects New Orleans with the Gulf of Mexico. The channel is blamed by many St. Bernard Parish residents and some hurricane protection experts for amplifying Hurricane Katrina's surge and hastening the loss of an estimated 27,000 acres of marshland that once shielded the metropolitan area's eastern flank.

## **Controversial proposals**

Those and other controversial proposals have been recommended before, but died in the face of opposition from interest groups that would be negatively affected, such as the residents of Lower Plaquemines or the shipping interests that will be shut out of the MR-GO.

In the past, the political ramifications of such impacts might have delayed or even killed coast-saving projects such as freshwater diversion before they ever got off the drawing board. But after Katrina, the political landscape has shifted to give added weight to hurricane protection and coastal restoration, said King Milling, an authority member and chairman of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Coastal Protection and Restoration, a separate body.

"At the end of the day, the state will push it harder and more aggressively," he said. "This is where the state's priority is."

### **'We can't save it all'**

In a sobering assessment of the seriousness of the coastal erosion threat, Milling acknowledged that even under the best of all possible scenarios, south Louisiana will never be what it once was.

"We can't save it all," he said.

And state officials said any new land that might be created through that and other projects would not necessarily be counted as better protection from major hurricanes by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Flood Insurance Program. Jon Porthouse, with the state Department of Natural Resources, said that's because the projects would minimize only the lesser flooding caused by small tropical storms or due to strong winds coming off the Gulf of Mexico during winter storms.

With its many and varied proposals, the state plan adopts a "multiple lines of defense" strategy proposed by John Lopez, a former corps official who now works for the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation.

The plan begins at the coastline, recommending rebuilding of barrier islands and shorelines, and of ancient natural ridges that once marked the paths of old Mississippi River distributaries.

It also recommends strengthening a variety of shorelines with rock or other materials, including the eastern edge of the Biloxi Marshes along Chandeleur Sound, the land bridge in eastern New Orleans between lakes Borgne and Pontchartrain and the land bridge between lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas.

In addition, the plan calls for using parts of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway to move freshwater into wetlands, antidote to saltwater erosion, as well as strengthening the

banks of the waterway. Dozens of other freshwater diversions would be installed along the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers, with some freshwater reintroduced into Bayou Lafourche, and then into wetlands along its path.

A major obstacle to determining the worth of the state proposal is not knowing the level of protection that will be afforded by the new levees, said Mark Davis, executive director of the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana. “That’s not on the map anywhere,” he said after the meeting. “I walked out of there with more questions than I had answers, but at least now we know what we’re questioning.”

State officials expressed similar frustration, blaming on the corps’ delay in determining exactly what kind of storms represent the risk of a 100-year or 500-year hurricane. Corps officials at Wednesday’s meeting were unable to say when that information would be available.

The corps has been attempting to determine the risk to use in shaping its own plan by running a variety of computer model simulations of hurricanes, but the work is not yet complete.

### **Long and winding road**

The proposals laid out Wednesday will have a long and winding political road ahead of them. The authority will consider a final version of the plan in February before presenting it to the Legislature in April. The plan then will be given to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for inclusion in the corps’ own Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Plan, which must be submitted to Congress by the end of April.

State officials on Wednesday offered no timelines, cost estimates, or estimates of how many wetlands acres might be affected by levees or restoration projects, saying that information won’t be available until much later.

But earlier state proposals, some containing similar projects, give an indication of the huge scope and cost of the new state plan. Officials have said a previous 30-year coastal restoration proposal would have cost \$14 billion. Separately, a draft of a corps plan for greater hurricane protection of the New Orleans area — which included a version of the Lake Borgne levee-gate plan — estimated the costs at more than \$23 billion.

Corps and state officials have been sharing information as they move forward with their separate plans. Sidney Coffee, chairwoman of the authority, said she is urging the corps to include the state plan as a separate part of their report, so members of Congress can compare the two plans.

### **Channel to be ‘plugged’**

In the plan to close the MR-GO, the channel would be “plugged” at Bayou la Loutre, the site of a natural ridge that was cut through when the shipping channel was built in the 1960s. The plug would end the channel’s use by shipping, mirroring a plan recommended by St. Bernard Parish officials.

The state then would allow the existing channel to be used to carry freshwater from a new diversion into the marshes along the outlet and into Lake Borgne.

But the state also recommends completion by the corps of a long-stalled project to widen the lock from the Mississippi River to the Industrial Canal to allow shipping now using the MR-GO to reach the France Road docks.

It’s unclear whether the state plan will overcome the objections of Port of New Orleans officials who have recommended building a gate at Bayou la Loutre that would be closed for hurricanes and continuing to dredge the channel until the lock is completed to allow shipping to reach the Industrial Canal from the Gulf.

St. Bernard Parish President Henry “Junior” Rodriguez welcomed the state’s plan.

“The priority is closing the MR-GO totally at Bayou la Loutre ridge,” Rodriguez said.

### **Residents displaced?**

Another controversial project would divert a major part of the Mississippi River’s water and sediment east into Breton Sound, and west into Barataria Bay to the north of Empire, leading to the abandonment of the historic bird-foot delta of the Mississippi River. That would require the creation of a new slow-moving channel for commercial shipping entering the river.

While the new diversions would help re-create the land-building function the river once performed, they also could mean the displacement of residents living along the sparsely populated peninsula that makes up lower Plaquemines, and cause habitat changes leading to serious disruptions to the fishing industry, one of Plaquemines economic mainstays.

“We are suggesting that it is impractical to provide and maintain a level of protection that is greater than is already provided by the existing levees,” Porthouse said of the southernmost part of Plaquemines. The decision would mean that residents wanting to live that far south probably will have to build elevated houses to remain eligible for flood insurance.

Plaquemines Parish President Benny Rousselle, a member of the authority, said that runs counter to the state’s often-repeated objective of leveraging coastal restoration to protect communities.

“To me it looks like they’re cutting us off,” he said. “It’s what we’ve been saying all along, that we need to restore our marshes and our coastlines because this is a buffer for the rest of the region. Unless we’re going to use it just for habitat.”

### **Great Wall of Louisiana’**

Equally controversial is the state plan to build the larger, stronger levees to protect communities from hurricane storm surge in a line broken only by navigation channels from along the Pearl River north of Slidell, along the West Bank, and then west to Morgan City in St. Mary Parish. That plan has previously been derided by critics as the so-called “Great Wall of Louisiana,” an overbuilt levee system that would bring development deep into fragile coastal wetlands and destroy the value of their wildlife and fisheries.

The levee system would follow the path of existing levees and levees either awaiting construction or awaiting congressional approval, including the West Bank and Vicinity, Donaldsonville to Gulf, and Morganza to Gulf levee projects.

In each case, the state will push for levee designs that allow water through to protect wetlands captured to the north of the new levees, said Randy Hanchey, deputy director of the state Department of Natural Resources.

The plan recommends avoiding construction of levees west of Morgan City where possible. Instead, Louisiana 84 and other state highway roadbeds would be raised and strengthened to provide protection where possible, though some stretches of levee might be needed to protect more densely populated areas.

In the future, a new levee system might also stretch around the southern edge of Lake Charles and Calcasieu Lake, protecting both the city and the collection of oil and petrochemical plants along the lake.

Restoration advocates said that at first glance, the state’s plan appears to put too much emphasis on levees — at the expense of rebuilding a coastal landscape left shattered by more than a century of development and natural degradation.

Still, they said the levee alignments proposed Wednesday were an improvement over earlier ideas offered by the Army Corps of Engineers.

“But if we don’t do some of this stuff, there will be nothing to be saved,” Milling said.

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