

It's Thanksgiving and with all the fall colors, pumpkins and crook neck squash, hay bales and scarecrows it's hard to miss it. What you can't see is the gratitude of all of the people of Bay Saint Louis for all the help they have been given from the top on down.

What you can see is a city in real recovery. A new sign of the change of seasons are the number of FEMA trailers being removed from the landscape, construction crews working on underground services, mums being planted in clean yards and the beginning of new construction of homes.

It continues to amaze me how responsive the people of America are to our need for help in recovery from the nation's worst natural disaster. Even though Bay Saint Louis has not been the focus of any significant coverage by the mainstream media you have spread the word through the electronic and cellular world that to help Bay Saint Louis is gratifying and needed.

There is not one area of our lives that volunteers have not touched. You continue to support our recovering children. Their needs have been so significant and during the frantic recovery of homes we have had little energy or time to devote to this most important group to complete the circle of recovery.

Our children are our most important asset, regardless of their age. My own children are grown, but they are my future. They are stepping up to the plate to take a good swing at making the community changes we need to make. I'm ready to move into the arena of respected elder and let them take over the reins of recovery. Our grown children are the ones that will pay the price for our future and they should be the ones to make the decisions. I may not like the decisions because it's harder for me to change my way of thinking. I find myself bogged down in memories and it's going to take young people without these burdens to really set our course of redevelopment.

School age children are coming around. Our educational community, whether public or private, is filled with compassionate educators that have pushed their limits to care for children traumatized by Katrina. For their caring efforts we must hold them in a very special regard. As our supporters, the American public has gone above and beyond to take away many of the burdens these educators have carried. You've provided supplies and friendship, fun and distractions that help them everyday know that they are loved the world over, not just at home. You have opened the doors of the world for them, which without Katrina may have remained closed. They could not have had a better geography lesson than to look at a map of this country and see from where all the help and love has come.

Housing is still a major issue and the mortgage crisis the country is experiencing hasn't helped any. However, we do hope that since the fires in California this fall that the call for a national catastrophic insurance will have more clout. When I heard the newscasters begin to say, "wind driven embers" I thought to myself, here's the out for insurance companies. I was glad to see that emergency response was quick and organized for those impacted by the fires. We've had so much loss in this country since 2005. Mother Nature must be really angry with us.

Rental properties are the slowest to recover and the rental prices are so very high that families who previously rented have had to move out of the area, stay in FEMA trailers the longest, and are the most unsettled. The upside to this has been that many of the homes that could be repaired are being purchased and repaired by the previous renters of the community. Home ownership is always better.

The brightest spot in housing is the work that Habitat for Humanities is doing throughout the county. The Habitat homes in the Bay are wonderful, either in a Habitat neighborhood or as in-fill construction. The artist's nature of Bay Saint Louis is evident in the interiors of these homes. Each one has something personal to the owner, painting the insides of kitchen cabinets bright blue or stenciling around the interior door frames. Lots of flowers and porch rockers are at almost every home. Habitat plans were perfectly developed for our area and have blended seamlessly.

Local churches are recovering their facilities. The First Baptist Church which has housed so many volunteers in their classrooms has removed the old church sanctuary. We see evidence of the building of the new sanctuary. I understand that many of the architectural elements of the old are being kept to integrate into the new construction.

Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church, the big church on Beach Boulevard, has completed the major renovations, but is still working on the small interior details. St. Rose has undertaken the expansion of facilities that have improved conditions for the parish and the volunteers who work with this church. The Sunday gospel Mass at St. Rose continues to be a favorite for volunteers.

First Presbyterian Church, although tiny, has packed a big punch in housing volunteers and using all of its resources to help families, primarily in the outlying areas. Lagniappe Presbyterian continues to grow in accommodations for volunteers and service to those in need. Many of our sister city groups stay with Lagniappe when they come to help.

Cityteam Ministries is still camped on the ball field, but the volunteers continue to come. I finally accepted their help and had a small group of volunteers from Jackson help me do the things at my home that I physically couldn't do for myself, or hire someone to do for me. It was a great experience and relief to have all the "honey-do's" done when there is no honey to help.

Almost every service is one of thanksgiving for the help that all of you have given and for God guiding you to our community.

I'm not going to address the politics of the city in this missive, except to say that conditions for the fire department continue to be primitive, but their new stations should be completed within the next several years and that our public works department continues to daily make improvements to our infrastructure. The mayor is well, as are all the councilmen. Please continue to pray that they show good judgment in the decisions they make.

And, in closing, with Christmas right around the corner, the one thing we continue to have a great need for is a grocery store. So anyone who wants a great little city to invest in please consider the service you can perform and the profit you can make in a recovering community and come open a grocery for us. We are all great cooks, love to eat, and are still traveling to other towns to "make groceries"!

Take care and God bless all of you. As you pray for us, we pray for you.

Mike Cuevas  
City of Bay Saint Louis