

# “The outpouring of support will be with me forever.”

by Mari Ann Callais, AB

Mari Ann Callais, ΘΦΑ National President, a 1986 AB initiate, waited out Hurricane Katrina from her home in Hammond, La. Since the storm, she has experienced an outpouring of kindness from ΘΦΑ sisters and the Greek community.

Growing up in the southernmost part of Louisiana, evacuating for hurricanes has always been a way of life. My family sustained damage during Hurricane Betsy (1965) and lost everything during Camille (1969). We moved back to Buras, La., and always knew the possibility of another hurricane wiping out our hometown, but I could never have been prepared for what happened during and especially after Katrina.

The night before the hurricane, I thought, what would I need to do to prepare various aspects of my life should something happen to my home, or me, or if we would be without power for an extended period of time? As ΘΦΑ National President, certain responsibilities are placed upon me not only by job description, but constitutionally. The night before Katrina hit, I sent an e-mail to The Grand Council and ΘΦΑ National Office transferring all duties to Karen Rubican, ΑΣ, National First Vice President.

In Hammond, La., where I live, about 50 miles north of New Orleans, we received winds of 120-130 miles per hour.

As the morning of August 29 progressed, I wondered if I should have evacuated as well. That day was the most uncertain one of my life. I didn't know if my family or friends in the area were okay. All we had was a battery operated radio.

The nights were dark. We had no power, telephone, cell phone, or e-mail. Finally, after three days in Hammond, I traveled 40 miles to Baton Rouge to get supplies such as ice, gas and batteries. When I finally got in range to where my cell phone would connect, I had 164 emails on my Blackberry and all of the subject lines read, “Are you okay?”

As I began to read the e-mails, all I could do was weep and remember how fortunate I am to have so many people who really care about me. The e-mails were from Theta Phi—both collegians and alumnae, other National Panhellenic Conference Presidents, CAMPUSPEAK and Capstone colleagues, Greek advisors, students from campuses or conventions I had visited, and the list goes on. Text messages also started coming in and voice messages started registering, and I could hear the fear in each voice, not knowing if I was okay.

The days seem cloudy now, but those messages will always be etched in my heart and memory. The outpouring of support will be with me forever.

For each person I spoke with, we shared tears of joy and tears of sadness. We knew there were many Theta Phi Alphas

who had been affected and we needed to figure out what we could do to help them. [Editor's Note: Read about the innovative program Mari Ann launched, "Helping Hands for Louisians," on page 17].

The song by Green Day partially explains how I felt during the month of September. The chorus says, "Wake me up, when September ends." I traveled, filled with uncertainty, to campuses throughout the country. I learned that there are amazing people who care deeply for others. I tried to keep people updated on the good that was happening around me. I saw so many kind people, especially sorority and fraternity women and men, reaching out to me and the people I care about.

Not long after the storm, the Beta Epsilon sisters asked if I would come and spend time with them, to talk about recruitment, Ritual, and just hang out (and play music, of course). What I did not realize was that I needed to be with them, too. We talked about the hurricane and where our families and friends were. For several of the collegians, the  $\Theta\Phi\Lambda$  house was the only home they had at the time.

It hurts me greatly that Alpha Beta, my own chapter at Loyola University in New Orleans, was not able to be together during the fall semester. It hurts that the seniors have not had a "normal" senior year, and that we, as alumnae, were not able to hang out with the collegians during the fall. I learned in a strange way what it's like to have a closed chapter that is not closed.

One thing I am especially thankful for is that I have experienced a level of love and care that I never would have fathomed. I hope none of us ever has to go through anything like this again, but if we do, I am confident that our  $\Theta\Phi\Lambda$  family will always be there to support and help in any way possible.

Thank you to all of you. Thank you for being the amazing women that you are and for allowing me to serve you. I don't think I would have made it through all of this without you. ■

Below is the e-mail note Mari Ann wrote to national officers, national office staff, chapter presidents, and alumnae association presidents on August 28, 2005—the night before Hurricane Katrina.

Dear Sisters,

As I write this, I am reminded of how close we are as sisters. For those of you who do not know, Hurricane Katrina is heading toward the Louisiana Coast. Alpha Beta, Beta Epsilon, and many volunteers live in Louisiana.

I just wanted to let you all know that as of now, we are all fine. We will know more by Tuesday morning the extent of the damage. I am staying at my home in Hammond, which is approx. 50 miles north of New Orleans. I will probably lose power sometime tonight or early Monday morning so with that said, please know that Karen Rubican is going to be the point person for any decisions or information involving the Fraternity.

Thank you to all of you for your thoughts and prayers. So many people have been calling, IMing, and e-mailing already today.

Take care and be safe. I will keep you posted when I can.

YITBOS,  
Mari Ann



# ΘΦΑ Sisters Help in Countless Ways

by Renée Gravois Lee, BE, Leslie Ervin Trahant, AB, and Christine Misch Rhein, AN

Theta Phi Alphas have responded in countless ways to hurricane relief efforts and to helping individual sisters and their families. The Fraternity, the Founders' Foundation, chapters, colonies, alumnae associations, and individual members have all come forward with tremendous generosity. These three pages feature a small sampling of the vital ways sisters are helping those impacted by the storms. Although, due to space constraints, *The Compass* cannot print all of the tremendous work being done, we celebrate each and every effort! Thank you to all sisters who have aided hurricane relief efforts in any way. Your outpouring of generosity, compassion and hard work is nothing short of inspirational.

## Helping and Hosting Evacuees

Theta Phi sisters' aid to hurricane evacuees has been enormous. For instance, for evacuees arriving in Kingsville, Tex., the women of the Kappa Chapter set up cots and tables, unloaded and separated the food, helped with registration and disbursement of supplies, and gave support to children and families.

Dozens of sisters have hosted friends, family and even strangers displaced by the storms, with some welcoming more people than their houses comfortably fit and some taking in guests' pets as well. Although such caregiving can cause financial and emotional stress (think of the extra groceries, cooking, laundry, childcare, errands, electricity bills, etc.), it also brings many personal rewards. Some of our sisters continue to gladly and selflessly host evacuees who are trying to rebuild their lives. Theta Phi Alpha salutes you!

## Clean-Up Efforts

Theta Phi Alphas have helped breathe a bit of life back into devastated areas through clean-up efforts. For instance, BY sisters volunteered at a local chapel after Hurricane Wilma, clearing debris and cleaning the playground. AB sisters volunteered for outreach in New Orleans, a massive clean-up and repair effort that is a joint project of Tulane, Loyola, Xavier and Dillard universities. More than 3,000 students, faculty, staff, and alumni from these universities, together with family, friends, and community volunteers, worked at over 30 sites, including neighborhoods, community centers and schools.

## Fund Raising and Supply Drives

Individually and collectively, Theta Phi sisters have supported hurricane relief with money and needed goods. For instance, the Pittsburgh Area Alumnae Association, to benefit the Theta Phi Disaster Relief Fund established by the Founders' Foundation, matched the contributions from individual sisters in the Pittsburgh area, thus doubling the amount of their total donation! Some groups' fund raising drives used other creative tactics, such as Gamma Chapter's "Trick or Treatin'" for canned goods for Katrina and Rita survivors. AB Chapter had recruitment supplies damaged

due to Katrina, and numerous Theta Phi sisters have sent donations to help replace them.

## "Helping Hands for Louisians" Program Launched by Mari Ann Callais

Following Hurricane Katrina, National President Mari Ann Callais, AB, together with her long-time friend, Michael Decker, Kappa Alpha, established "Helping Hands for Louisians." This grass-roots effort called upon the fraternity and sorority community to reach out by sending gift cards to let storm survivors know the Greek community cares. The program generated \$7,000+ in gift cards that have been distributed to help 65 individuals and families in need, including Theta Phi sisters and their families.

Theta Phis donated many of the gift cards. For example, Alpha Mu collected and contributed more than \$500 in gift cards.

## "Gift of Hope" Brings Christmas to Affected Families

Inspired by the "Helping Hands" program, Dr. Lori Hart Ebert launched "Gift of Hope" to help bring Christmas to storm survivors. Dr. Ebert was a guest speaker at the 2005 Theta Phi Leadership Conference. More than 80 families were adopted by teams and individuals. Several Theta Phi sisters participated by adopting families.

## You Can Still Help!

Theta Phi Alpha urges you to support hurricane relief efforts in every way possible. Recovery and rebuilding along the Gulf Coast and other affected areas will take years to complete, and sisters will continue to need assistance as they rebuild their homes and communities. Many reputable organizations still need funding and volunteers. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Founders' Foundation of Theta Phi Alpha to help provide Theta Phi Disaster Relief Grants to sisters in need. Donate online at [www.ThetaPhiAlpha.org](http://www.ThetaPhiAlpha.org) or phone (877) THETA PH(I).



Alpha Beta sisters prepare hurricane relief bags for residents of the Ninth Ward section of New Orleans