



Chi-Epsilon Service Project

New Orleans, LA

May 21 – 26, 2006



On Sunday, May 21, 2006, a group of NJIT students left for New Orleans, LA to join in the continuing efforts in assisting communities affected by last year's devastating hurricane season. Many of these communities consist of inhabited structures that make for nothing more than a ghost town. This 4-day service project was organized under the direction of Chi Epsilon President Steven Nagy and supported by NJIT's Newark College of Engineering and the Alumni Association.

The group of students teamed up with Rebuild Together who has been partnering with The Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans. The mission of this organization is to assist elderly homeowners in the rebuilding of their homes in hopes of attracting people to move back into these communities. The focus of this particular relief effort is to assess those homes that are structurally sound with less than 50% sustained damage and confirmed to be complete of any necessary mold remediation.

Rebuild Together is one of many organizations that utilizes Camp Algiers, a facility operated by FEMA. For accommodations, this camp includes one very large, climate-controlled, co-ed tent that contains around 200 beds as well as a quartered-off section for women who prefer that option. The camp also had areas to relax and unwind, bathroom and shower facilities, a laundry-mat-tent, a first-aid trailer, and most importantly, a full-scale dining cafeteria that provided three meals a day.

Having arrived at camp just after 12 Noon on Sunday, our group decided to visit the French quarter after having lunch. The time spent there was filled with eating great food, listening to live Jazz and Blues, and shopping at the open-air market. The following morning, for almost 4 continuous days, our group worked on two homes that were nearly complete and ready for the families to move back into. The work we performed included debris removal, spackling, painting, trim work, carpentry, and the installation of shelving and miscellaneous hardware. In the collage of pictures, the lower left-hand corner depicts a group photo taken with one of the homeowners, Mrs. Samson. It was a pleasure meeting the recipient of all the work and efforts made that so many put forth.

On our last day of work, a group of us went down to the 9th ward where residents live a block away from the levees. As we made our way over the canal, we were greeted by the horrific remnants of the damage done. In some places, block after block revealed foundations, concrete blocks or front steps, but no houses. Some were moved, on top of other structures and cars, while others were completely destroyed with the rubbish spread throughout the town. The reality is that hundreds of homes are no more. A local public library was structurally sound, but its contents couldn't stand the weather. With everything damaged, the doors beyond the front gates were locked with chains. Other areas of the city revealed several auto-graveyards that would span miles underneath the elevated highways. The worst of it was when we came across a block where people were trying to pick up the pieces and carry on with life. One sign requested those passing by to respect their community and to not make it a tourist attraction. The truth is, we could have spent our entire week taking pictures, recording video and listening to personal stories. And though a picture be worth a thousand words, all that would never be adequate to describe the hell so many have died from and lived through. Each picture tells a story and to us, that story can mean different things. But to those having gone through it, that story is their reality. And though that story will never change, there will always be opportunity to write a new chapter – one that offers hope and a future.

*"Consider making an investment in the lives of people who don't have.
Consider the difference your investment will make."*

