

Victims' eye in the sky

BY RICHARD J. DALTON JR.
STAFF WRITER

After another long day of taking aerial photos of areas hit by Hurricane Katrina, a cameraman for the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration began posting the photos online at the business center of a Gulf Coast hotel, home to many displaced residents.

Nearby, a woman in her 60s who had walked in with a cane was surfing the Internet when she began sobbing. "I said, 'What are you crying about?'" NOAA cameraman Steven Snow recalled. "She said, 'I found my house. I know it's standing.'"

"I said, 'Oh good, I'm glad my pictures are doing some good.' And she said, 'Oh, you took these?'" I said, 'Yeah, we took those yesterday.' And she just broke down crying and gave me a little hug. She was very happy."

Depending on how their homes appear in the photos on computer screens, evacuees have expressed either joy or sorrow at the business center of Panama City, Fla.'s Marriott Bay Point Resort Village, which is home to many hurricane evacuees and also serves as a base for the NOAA team taking aerial photos of the devastation. "There were just numerous people that were so happy," said Stephen White, who processed the NOAA images. "And there was actually people crying. It was very emotional."

Hurricane survivors all over are turning to the NOAA Web site — <http://ngs.woc.noaa.gov/katrina/> — to check out aerial photos of the devastation. Hurricane victims also have turned to Google, which has posted the aerial photos and made them searchable by street address via its maps.google.com and its mapping software, available at earth.google.com. By Saturday, the NOAA site had served up more than 4,500 gigabytes — that's 4.5 million megabytes — of images. To get a sense of volume, a high-quality image from a digital camera can be just a few megabytes.

The images are very detailed. One man at the hotel who asked Snow for help finding images of his home discovered a surprise. "There was a big, brand-new RV that had drifted over onto his front step, and you could see that in the pictures," Snow said.

NOAA's aerial photo team has spent about eight hours a day flying over devastated areas since last Tuesday, collecting and posting more than 6,000 images of the areas hit, said Lt. Cmdr. Will Odell, a pilot for NOAA's aircraft operations center.

Odell spoke to one woman who evacuated with her siblings and mother, and whose father stayed behind.

"They didn't hear from their dad for four or five days," Odell said. "But they could see from the photographs that the area wasn't hard hit. And finally they got in touch with their dad and he was fine."

Greg Hernandez, a NOAA spokesman, said people have e-mailed and called him with questions — and thanks. One man said he had been afraid to take his mother to her home, fearing it had been destroyed. "Through the aerial images they found their home, which turned out to be high and dry — unaffected," Hernandez said.



NEWSDAY PHOTOS / VIORREL FLORESCU



Reality hits home

New Orleans police officer Kevin Diel returned to his Lakeview neighborhood to check on his two-story home yesterday. Because the water had risen to the bottom of his first-floor living room window, Diel had to climb onto the roof and enter his home by breaking a second-floor window with the magazine of his gun.

NEW ORLEANS — Driving northwest on Interstate 10 yesterday morning, police officer Kevin Diel entered a world half-submerged.

Beyond the Superdome — still engulfed by water, its top parking tier now a landing strip for military helicopters — one passes graveyards whose above-ground crypts have become islands in a fetid sea. Then, over near the 610 split, the freeway disappears underwater. That's where Diel stopped off in the patrol car that holds all he has left. After a chaotic week trying to restore order to a city ravaged by Hurricane Katrina, he wasn't due on shift until 6 p.m. So he headed out to see how close he could get to his rented two-story house in the flooded Lakeview district.

Diel, 22, moved there four months ago from the city's West Bank, "which is dry," he noted with irony,

"into a safer neighborhood with the other cops."

A rifle slung over his shoulder, Diel stood in the hot sun and assessed the seaworthiness of a flat-bottomed boat lying in the shallow water lapping at the highway. He had heard the houses were 20, maybe 30 feet underwater in his neighborhood. That was a good mile and a half across the water from where he stood, sweating bullets in a bulletproof vest covered by his black police T-shirt.

In a flood-stricken city where hotel rooms without electricity sell for \$100 a night and police have already siphoned out gas from all the abandoned vehicles, a working boat with a full tank of gas is hard to come by. The motor on this one was busted, but there were a few paddles inside and some boards that could be used for the same purpose. Diel felt it was worth a shot.

It was slow going, paddling down the interstate toward the airport. The water had risen to about a foot below a railroad bridge. With no room to row under, Diel and a crew of shot-hungry photographers and a reporter who hitched a ride in

the commandeered boat humped it up over the trestle, scavenging another abandoned rowboat in the process to form a caravan bound for 323 Kenilworth St.

Back in the water, the boats passed a factory-like building bristling with half-submerged thick beige pumps, which Diel later identified as "our new, state-of-the-art pumping system that failed."

Turning off onto a side street, all was hushed, save for the choppers that roared sporadically overhead, ruffling the brownish-green water. No corpses were visible. Enormous iridescent dragonflies skimmed low over debris and tree limbs bobbing in the water.

It was as if the bayou rose and engulfed the neighborhood.

Navigating past submerged cars and the tops of drowned trees, Diel reached his house about an hour and a half after pushing off from the interstate. The street signs barely poked above the water. "It's hard to recognize just the top half of a house," he said.



REPORT FROM NEW ORLEANS
JENNIFER SMITH

In Biloxi, many in community looking ahead

BY RIDGELY OCHS
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BILOXI, Miss. — More than a week after Hurricane Katrina smacked into this Gulf Coast town, the scene outside the Main Street Baptist Church resembled a surreal street fair.

As many homes in this poor, mostly black neighborhood lay in splinters and electric lines hung in swooping arcs over littered streets, residents gathered to get water, food, supplies and comfort from each other. Many waited patiently Monday and yesterday to get tetanus shots from a mobile medical unit donated by the Manhattan-based Children's Health Fund. Others, who need medication for various ailments but have been without it for days, waited to have their blood pressure checked.

Paul Simon, a major sponsor of the non-profit organization, which supports pediatric medical units nationwide, was on hand yesterday, wearing a baseball cap and a worried expression. A few people recognized him and posed for pictures, but most residents didn't seem to notice the singer-songwriter. They were still trying to come to grips with the devastation that has swept away life as they have known it.

Many like Don Rankin, 48, have been sleeping outside. Having survived 5½ hours in his almost water-filled attic, Rankin said his home is now covered in mud and he's worried about gas leaks. Despite the destruction, he's determined to stay.

"I was born and raised here," he said. "I didn't get drowned. My mama is living, all my family is living. It's all right."

Others are less certain about whether they will rebuild their lives here or elsewhere. Stevonne Doughty, 43, says she'll probably send her 16-year-old daughter to

live with relatives so that she won't lose valuable school time in her junior year. A nurse on disability, she's unclear about where she will live. For the past week, she's been staying in the church, where she, her daughter and son fled along with about 100 other residents before the storm. They spent the next three days with little food or water.

Food and other supplies, including clothes and linens, are now more plentiful, she said. "But what's the point of taking sheets and towels if you don't have a home to take them to?"

The church's pastor, the Rev. Kenneth Haynes, said members are still feeding 500 to 600 people two hot meals a day — down from 1,000 right after the hurricane. He said he is moved by the generosity of churches around the country, who have been sending supplies — everything from toilet articles to infant formula to flashlights — to his church and other churches in the area. He had less kind things to say about the Federal Emergency Management Agency. "FEMA came in the first day and they haven't been back," he said.

Even though the displaced face uncertain futures, many seem to be coping.

"People are basically upbeat," said Aurelia Jones-Taylor, chief executive of the Aaron Henry Community Health Center in Clarksdale, Miss., whose medical mobile unit is partially funded by the Children's Health Fund. "They appear to be supporting each other as a community and helping others."

Rodney Thompson, 40, who helped save seven neighbors, including a 9-month-old he held aloft in roiling waters up to his waist, said he's started rebuilding his house. He's sleeping outside right now but remains undaunted.

He said, "You've got to keep on moving on."



Singer Paul Simon, center, listens to the Rev. Edward Moses during a visit to Biloxi, Miss., Monday to help with an emergency mobile unit.

becomes makeshift jail



NEWSDAY PHOTO / VIOREL FLORESCU

■ After inmates were evacuated from cells, operations resumed here, but a leadership breach causes concern

BY JENNIFER SMITH
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

NEW ORLEANS — A taped cardboard sign on the front of the Greyhound bus station near Interstate 10 proclaims “We are taking New Orleans Back.”

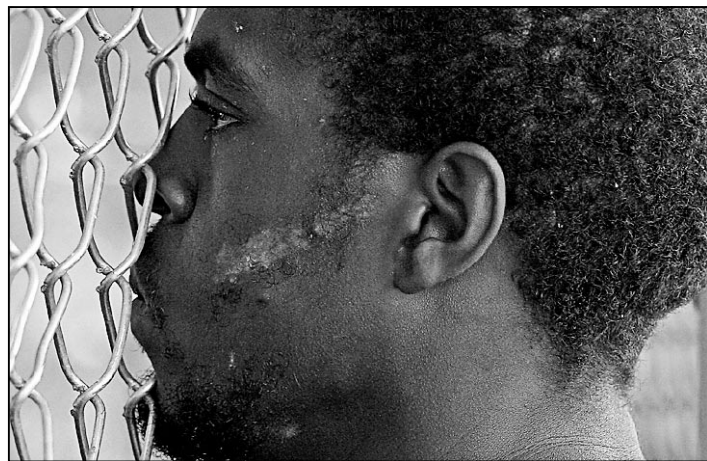
An idling Amtrak locomotive generates most of the electricity. Welcome to the new Central Booking for criminal suspects in Orleans Parish.

The main jail was evacuated last week after being flooded with 5 feet of water, with inmates and guards dispersed. Now, law and order seemed to be returning to the city, eight days after Hurricane Katrina smashed the city’s infrastructure and set loose panic and looting in some neighborhoods. By yesterday, streets that had been patrolled last week by a skeleton crew of New Orleans police officers fairly bristled with armed people in uniform — the National Guard, state troopers from across the country, even agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

Operations at the bus station are being run by the Louisiana State Department of Corrections, which stepped in at the prompting of State Attorney General Charles Foti Jr. — the former Orleans Parish criminal sheriff — to fill the apparent breach left by local leadership.

“We wish the sheriff would come on back,” Burl Cain, warden of Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, said yesterday morning.

The sheriff Cain referred to



AFP / GETTY IMAGES PHOTO

An inmate waits for his temporary jail cell yesterday.

is Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff Marlon Gusman, who state corrections officials said has been difficult to reach since Hurricane Katrina forced an evacuation of approximately 6,000 inmates from Orleans Parish Prison.

“We would love it if he would come help us,” Cain said, adding that Gusman had not returned to the makeshift jail since Tuesday. State corrections officers in boats have since visited the flooded prison to try to retrieve booking records, many of which were soaked when the water rose, he said. Reporters also have been unable to reach him for comment.

The Orleans prisoners have been parceled out to various state prisons, including the all-male Angola prison, where Cain hired the first ob/gyn doctor to handle the 500 females now housed there. “This morning we had our first baby born at Angola,” he said yesterday.

Since Sunday, a total of 171 arrestees — most booked for looting — have passed through here, said Lt. Col. Bobby Achord, an official from the Louisiana State Penitentiary in

Angola who came down to New Orleans on Friday to set things up.

What he found when he arrived was chaos. Garbage and feces were strewn across the floor. Looters had pillaged the gift shop and run riots in the Subway sandwich restaurant; displaced residents who sought shelter here had dragged office furniture outside.

Out back, the numbered slots where buses parked have become holding cells, hemmed in by 12-foot-high chain-link fences topped with razor wire. Nearby, large red holding tanks that look like wading pools hold water to wash down the cells and for staffers to bathe in portable showers that Walmart donated. Each cell has a doorless Porta Potti. “They have no expectation of privacy,” Achord said.

But they are, for now, in semi-private rooms — only six prisoners were in evidence yesterday morning, although Achord said 120 men and 37 women were processed and moved out Tuesday. Cain said he expected more would be booked later for looting. “The worms come out at night,” he said.

transformed into a city jail.

A stall in evacuations to LI, elsewhere

BY EMI ENDO
AND CHAU LAM
STAFF WRITERS

Even as Nassau and Suffolk County officials continued to develop programs to house up to 300 survivors of Hurricane Katrina, Gov. George Pataki said the Federal Emergency Management Agency has put on hold plans to fly large numbers of evacuees to the New York area.

Pataki said yesterday that while the state was preparing to accept 5,000 evacuees — including 1,000 in New York City and 150 each in Nassau and Suffolk — FEMA suspended evacuations outside the Southeast for now, because many prefer to

stay closer to their homes.

“The evacuees want to go home, they don’t want to go someplace else,” Pataki said in Eastport as he selected trees to be planted at the six-acre World Trade Center memorial.

Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy and Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi said late last week that FEMA requested shelter for the evacuees for up to 18 months, possibly as soon as today.

“We’re hanging on the edge of our seat for the latest indication as to who is coming and how many,” Levy said.

But as of last night, the state emergency management office, which is coordinating local Kat-

rina assistance efforts, had not directed the counties to abandon their plans, and local officials said they expect to be updated again this morning. FEMA is asking New York and other states to stand by while the agency tries to identify survivors who want to leave, where they want to go and how best to get them there, said spokesman Butch Kierney. There are, however, no plans to send evacuees to New York today. “It could be days before we know for sure,” he said.

Tentative plans include flying New York-bound evacuees to Stewart International Airport in Newburgh where they would stay at Camp

Smith in Peekskill for two days to receive medical treatment and get new identification if necessary.

They would then be transported to locations across the state, including Long Island, said Joseph Williams, Suffolk’s commissioner of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services.

At a meeting of the Nassau Legislature in Mineola last night, members of Long Island’s black community asked for assurance that the evacuees would not be relegated to the county’s poorest communities.

“The only question I have is where are we going to put them?” said Douglas Mayers, of

Freeport, president of the Freeport-Roosevelt NAACP.

Iris Johnson, executive director of the county Economic Opportunity Commission, told the lawmakers, “The last thing we want to do is shortchange our own people.”

In Nassau, the evacuees would first be taken to SUNY Old Westbury for processing before being relocated to 10 shelters and a number of area hotels and other sites. In Suffolk, officials were planning to transport evacuees by bus or plane to the shuttered Brunswick Hospital Center.

Staff writers Mitchell Freedman and Brandon Bain contributed to this story.

'Unwatering' proceeds

■ But it's hardly a cinch as Army Corps of Engineers works around clock to get pumps to drain tainted water into Lake Pontchartrain

NEW ORLEANS — Dank water still maroons homes and businesses in about half of New Orleans. But inch by murky inch, sewage-tainted floodwater is being pumped out of the streets and into Lake Pontchartrain as a host of federal, state and local agencies labor in a massive effort to dry out the city.

The Army Corps of Engineers, which is supervising what officials call the "unwatering" project, said most of the water should be removed from Orleans Parish by Oct. 2 and from hard-hit St. Bernard Parish and eastern New Orleans by Oct. 8.

In the days since the levees crumbled under Hurricane Katrina's assault and unleashed a torrent of water on this bowl-

shaped city, workers such as pumping station supervisor Renauldo Robertson — who was stranded for three days at one flooded facility — have put in nearly

24-hour shifts to resurrect the 21 municipal pumping stations. At stations where the power will not flow, Robertson and other workers turn large wheels by hand that open gates in the flooded canals and drain water toward other stations with running pumps.

Ten of those facilities are now operational, with 27 working pumps, the Army Corps of Engineers said yesterday.

The municipal pumps are augmented by 46 portable diesel-powered ones like those that subcontractor Cajun Constructors trucked down from Baton Rouge to drain the submerged lakefront district near Pontchartrain Park. About 100 people, some in white contamination suits and visored helmets, are working to drain flooded regions here and farther east, quality control manager Jamey Sandefur said.

The work has not been without hitches. With electrical service out in much of the city, the pumps guzzle "inordinate" amounts of fuel, Sandefur said. And checkpoints ringing the city have slowed traffic to a crawl, nearly tripling the time it takes to get supplies.

Still, by Sunday, the flooding



REPORT FROM
NEW ORLEANS

JENNIFER
SMITH

in the Gentilly Woods neighborhood had gone down about 16 inches. The water revealed fenceposts and crushed banana trees as it receded and left mildewed stripes that reached nearly to the rooftops.

The diesel-powered pumps resemble cannons whose muzzles shoot a constant stream of foul brown liquid over a retaining wall that separates the houses here from the Inter-Harbor Navigational Canal. The floodwater then forms a stinking,

foamy pool that drains southward, cutting across hurricane-devastated boatyards toward the canal and finally emptying into Lake Pontchartrain.

Dumping water fouled with feces and bacteria into the large, shallow lake that forms the Crescent City's curving northern border might not strike

some as the most sanitary course of action.

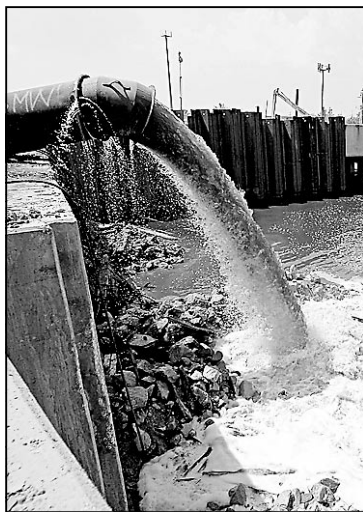
But Chris Piehler, a senior environmental scientist with Louisiana's Department of Environmental Quality, defends the plan, saying the payoff outweighs the possible environmental concerns.

Piehler said extensive testing by state and federal environmental agencies shows the water has more "organic substances" — excrement, dirt and vegetation brought in by the hurricane's fierce winds — than it does persistent toxic substances such as chemicals.

While hardly appetizing, that mix is something that Piehler said Lake Pontchartrain can assimilate without taking too much of an environmental hit.

The sewage could lead to some temporary mortality among the fish that swim here, Piehler said. "The pros are we can use existing facilities to get the water off city streets as soon as possible."

Special correspondent
Marlene Naanes
contributed to this story.



Pumping tainted water into the large, shallow lake worries some.

AFP / GETTY IMAGES PHOTO



Pump station supervisor Renauldo Robertson with a century-old piece of machinery that helps

No easy job to turn the

BY MARLENE NAANES
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW ORLEANS — The smell of sewage filled the air the day Renauldo Robertson returned to the pumping station where he was stranded for three days after Hurricane Katrina hit town. Two weeks later, the station in Uptown had no electricity, the pumps were still flooded with murky water, and Robertson was unnerved.

"We had some nightmares here," said Robertson, a 27-year veteran of the city Sewerage & Water Board. "I've been in and out of hurricanes all my life. This is the

only one that shook me."

Robertson, a pump station supervisor, was stranded two weeks ago in the 100-year-old pumping station without food, water or electricity. He and his workers were about to leave after the hurricane hit. "We thought we had the water under control so I thought, 'Maybe I'm going home,'" he said. "Then I saw water rolling down Broad Street."

Robertson and the other workers climbed to a catwalk inside, hoping to ride out the flooding. "The bugs were eating us up," he said. "The heat was getting to us, so we actually had to stand in the water."

The workers survived on pilfered food and water sent to the station on mattresses by looters, he said, until a supervisor was able to boat to there three days later. "It was traumatic," he recalled of the boat ride through nearby housing projects. "The people in the projects were acting like they wanted to take out the boat and try to kill us."

In the ride out, Robertson had to cut his boat from a tangled mess in the water and passed a floating body. He eventually arrived at an interstate ramp where trucks rescued pump station workers and residents. Robertson eventually made it to another pump sta-