

# Not Unlike Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana CEOers are a Fierce Force to be Reckoned With in their Resolve to Bring New Orleans Back

*By Karen Seidman*

Not satisfied with only reaching into their wallets, writing hefty checks and donating household items, supplies and boxes of clothing for the hundreds of thousands affected by Hurricane Katrina's devastation, CEO members in Louisiana are taking the lead in making a real difference. Now some 10 months after the biggest and most devastating natural disaster slammed into the Gulf Coast, CEOers are united in their determination and steadfast in their commitment to rebuild and restore New Orleans, not only back to the shining city it once was – but better.

Front and center in the Crescent City's redevelopment efforts is CEOer **Donald T. "Boysie" Bollinger**, chairman of the board and chief executive officer of Bollinger Shipyards, Inc., a full-service marine construction and repair operation, headquartered in Lockport, LA with 12 divisions in Louisiana, two divisions in Texas and activities extending into the international market. CEOers may remember an email from Boysie providing an update and assuring his concerned CEO colleagues that his family was safe just a few short days after Katrina hit.

Bollinger is a key member of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, the 17-member rebuilding committee New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin formed within two weeks after the hurricane struck to help advise him on the best ways to bring the city of New Orleans back.

But that's not the extent of it. Weeks later, Bollinger was also plucked by Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco to sit on her advisory group to assist her in bringing small and large businesses back to life in the storm-damaged areas in parts of the state other than New Orleans. The Hurricane Recovery Advisory Committee is comprised of a group of highly respected business, education and community leaders. As Bollinger is one of two members serving on both groups, he was named as liaison and does his part in assuring both committees are in sync and working towards similar goals as part of greater cooperative implementation efforts.

Though Bollinger is definitely at home in the political arena, enjoying close ties to the White House and frequently traveling to DC to discuss recovery efforts with congressional delegations, he's a businessman at heart; and as such, also makes time to work with New Orleans' local business community in their efforts. According to Bollinger, the business community is well organized, powerful and "unusually aggressive" in assuring the city has a workable strategy and the necessary funds to rebuild the city with essential improvements.

Louisiana CEO member **John P. Laborde** is also no stranger to advisory committees. He, too, was asked to serve on a planning and coordinating committee appointed by Gov. Blanco. The committee that Laborde sits is also part of the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA), a body charged with assisting implementing the Governor's vision for the recovery of Louisiana.

Laborde, founder and retired chairman and CEO of Tidewater, an off-shore energy service company owning and operating almost 700 energy-support vessels, was appointed as chairman of the six-member LRA Support Foundation Committee, whose duties encompass policy support, research, issue analysis, planning support, identifying and hiring expert consultants and fund-raising. To date, the Committee has raised some US\$8 million from private sources.

But CEO members are doing much more than helping state and local government officials through committee work.

Though an LA member, as in Los Angeles and not Louisiana, CEOer **Bruce Karatz**, chairman and CEO of KB Home, one of the US' premier and most respected new home builders, also got the calling. As recently profiled in the April 3, 2006 issue of *FORTUNE* magazine, 60-year old Karatz infuriated over the government's failed Katrina response, and feeling a "moral obligation" to help, has signed on to play a major role in reconstructing New Orleans.

KB Home has become the first and only national homebuilder to come New Orleans, to date. And this bold endeavor was no easy decision. Karatz had to convince his reluctant board of directors who were filled with reservations. Over the years, KB Home has been extremely successful, pulling double-digit growth earnings for 18 consecutive quarters. Much of that success was a result of strategic calculations -- going into only those locations declared ripe and fertile by sophisticated market research. New Orleans, offering no certainty of how many of its displaced residents will ultimately return, and those that do how many will really be able to afford a new home, was truly a risk, but according to Karatz, one well worth taking.

It's a good thing, too. The challenge of housing was agreed as the biggest problem facing the recovery efforts by those CEO members *Compass* spoke with.

Longtime New Orleans resident and CEO member **Ted Laborde**, a retired insurance executive with Marsh and McLennan and a relative of John Laborde, also cited housing as a major complication. With 200,000 homes destroyed, the lack of suitable housing not only curtails once New Orleans residents from returning, but makes it challenging for those now working in the city to live – another hurdle in affecting businesses' workforces.

Ted who has served on various boards for educational institutions, also was concerned with how schools were devastated throughout the city. With no public schools in some parishes and many private schools damaged or too costly an expense for the majority of residents to afford, this was also a chief obstacle in preventing families to return to the area.

Ted, who was extremely active with Tulane University and its health services center, has been actively engaged in the University's recovery efforts and assisting displaced students.

CEO Board member **David Calhoun**, who lives in Lafayette, 135 miles west of New Orleans, is actively involved with the Community Foundation of Acadiana, which has concentrated much of its efforts responding to the needs of its residents as a result of Katrina

and Hurricane Rita, which created its enormous share of additional devastation along the Southwest coast, just a short 30 days later. He serves on the board and the executive committee of the Foundation which was established to serve the perpetual care and improve the quality of life for individuals across a seven-parish, seven-county region.

According to Calhoun, he's not at all surprised by CEOers taking the lead in Louisiana's recovery.

"Every Louisiana member in and outside of New Orleans is involved with this in one way or another. It doesn't surprise me that our past and current business leaders are taking active roles of authority and being called upon in all phases of the recovery efforts," said Calhoun.

But restoring "The Big Easy" to better than its pre-storm status is turning out to be anything but its whimsical nickname.

Hurricane Katrina was indeed the costliest and one of the deadliest hurricanes in American history, and as echoed by each CEO member that *Compass* spoke with, the enormity and extent of the unforgiving damage is truly unfathomable -- affecting virtually every infrastructure -- levees, highways, bridges, sewers, housing, businesses, schools, etc.

Despite the fact that progress to date has been frustratingly slow-going, and the start of a new hurricane season begins June 2006 with their levee system still very much in a precarious state, CEO members are optimistic and united in their resolve and determination to rebuild. One thing is clear. The CEOers of Louisiana will not only keep the spirit of New Orleans alive, but will work as long and as hard as necessary to resurrect this special city that holds such a dear place in their hearts.