



editorial

In the Wake of Hurricane Katrina...

By James E. Trant

CASE Chair, 2005-06

I am offering my observations of the effects of Hurricane Katrina, not with a sense of any special insight, but that of an outsider from New England. I have only been to New Orleans a few times. But, I was stunned at the devastation that Hurricane Katrina caused to the people and City of New Orleans as well as so much of the southern Gulf coast of the United States. The damage caused to communities in Alabama and Mississippi is similarly distressing to the country. Our prayers and thoughts must be focused on the victims and their families.

The images are surreal. The response of the emergency workers almost seemed to be in slow motion, and I wasn't someone awaiting the aid. How agonizing it must have been to need rescuing and not see anyone coming. The work of the region and our nation has barely begun. What role will Engineers play in this effort? Hopefully, the organization and focus of the engineering community will be more closely monitored and directed than the initial emergency response seemed to be from the outside of the disaster.

It seems like the task ahead will be monumental. Re-creating a city like New Orleans, with all of its unique infrastructure anomalies will test the will, resolve and technical talents of our nation. Sometimes, what makes a city great are its flaws. The little annoyances to its citizens (like small meandering streets or being below sea level) which draw attention and attract visitors may not be worth recreating. Certainly the concept of a city on the sea, below sea level, must be discussed and evaluated. The Old World appearance of New Orleans can be designed; can the Old World feel be designed as well?

Engineers must and will be part of the team which answers many of the questions that will be asked. Civil, Environmental, Hydraulic and Hydrologic Engineers will focus on the infrastructure along with Electrical, Mechanical

and Urban planners. Foundation and Structural Engineers, along with Architects and other Construction Professionals, will be asked to evaluate existing buildings, bridges and flood control structures to determine their long term ability to continue to contribute to the future of the new New Orleans. Petroleum and specialized Process Piping Engineers will evaluate the refinery facilities and, undoubtedly, develop improvements to their capabilities to withstand similar catastrophic events.

I have received many e-mails from our national professional engineering organizations (the American Society of Civil Engineers, The American Council of Engineering Companies, the National Society of Professional Engineers, and others) urging their members to contribute to the charity of their choice to assist the victims, and to be prepared to assist in other more technical activities which may be necessitated by the reconstruction efforts. As these and many other organizations suggest, we must be prepared to use our talents for the betterment of our society. Isn't that what it means to be a Professional Engineer? I am certain that we are up to the tasks ahead. ■

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See *CASE In Point* in this issue for contact information from various National Charities involved with Katrina relief.