



United Way Partner Agency

THE COMMUNITY CENTER OF ST BERNARD

1107 LeBeau Street
Arabi LA 70032
www.CCSTB.org

CellPhone: (504) 617-2580
Phone: (504) 281-2512
Fax: (916) 675-7827

What is East of New Orleans?

Reflections on the Third Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina

The media continues to do a great disservice to hurricane victims in the greater New Orleans area by referring to what transpired here as a natural disaster. In truth what happened in this region was not natural, unlike the Hurricane Katrina damage in eastern Mississippi and the Hurricane Rita damage in western Louisiana and Texas. The damage done by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the Orleans and St Bernard Parishes of Louisiana was a direct result of the failure of the Federal government's flood control infrastructure (levees and pumps), combined with the fact that the man-made Mississippi Gulf River Outlet (MRGO) served as a deep water conduit and allowed an unimpeded storm surge of up to 30 feet tall to completely inundate everything in its path.

The result? Destruction on a scale that passed well beyond disaster and into the realm of the catastrophic. In St Bernard Parish, the epicenter of devastation, fully 93% of homes were rated as "severely damaged" or "destroyed".

Why did this happen? When the Army Corps of Engineers built MRGO they destroyed 168 miles of wetlands and removed 4 natural barriers (ridge lines). Oil and gas companies in the region have also dug numerous canals in the wetlands in their ongoing search for petroleum reserves; these canals are not required to be backfilled when they are taken out of use. Together the canals and MRGO allow the infiltration of brackish Gulf waters which have decimated the once thriving cypress groves that formed a natural barrier between the Gulf of Mexico and the New Orleans region. If the wetlands and cypress groves that existed in 1965 had been intact when Katrina made landfall it never could have caused the horrific destruction that it did in St Bernard Parish and the New Orleans region as a whole.

St. Bernard Parish itself is located directly east of New Orleans lower Ninth Ward. This peninsula is about 3 miles wide by 30 miles long and runs from the Industrial Canal on the Western side to the Gulf of Mexico on the East. It pains me deeply that St Bernard Parish, unlike the lower Ninth Ward, remains all but completely forgotten. This is the only Parish (county) in the history of our country to have been completely inundated by flood waters causing catastrophic devastation, and the Parish was also the site of the Murphy Oil spill (the largest domestic residential oil spill in US history) caused by hurricane damage to the Murphy Oil Refinery. Yet few outside the New Orleans region are even aware that it exists, much less of the ongoing recovery struggle that continues every day here, 3 years after the hurricanes.

The Community Center of St Bernard is a community-based grassroots 501 (c) (3) nonprofit. Our mission is to assist local residents in their return to their homes, and to help normalize life in these trying times. We are dedicated to providing a wide range of necessary community services, including free food, clothes, internet access, free long distance and local phone service, computer classes, hot meals, and community events such as after school programs and workshops.

The Community Center facility also serves as a meeting place for many local groups such as the St Bernard Parish Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Old Arabi Neighborhood Association, Arabi Neighborhood Block Watch and various Masonic lodges. And we actively seek to form collaborations with partner agencies to bring additional needed services to St Bernard Parish residents, including free medical care, legal aid, crisis counseling, and food stamp assistance.

More information about the various programs and services available through the Community Center is available at our webpage www.ccstb.org

There remains so much to be done here -- for many of the clients we serve, this is NOT a recovery but merely a later stage in an ongoing crisis. Though numerous celebrities and aspiring politicians (Oprah, Amy Goodman, Brad Pitt) have come as close as New Orleans, they are unlikely to ever venture beyond the Lower Ninth Ward, so they will remain in the dark about the lives and struggles of the people in St Bernard. Thank you for anything you can do to help us - it is much appreciated!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R.M. Nabatoff". The signature is written in a cursive style with some overlapping strokes.

R.M. "Iray" Nabatoff, Executive Director
Community Center of St Bernard
CCSTBP@yahoo.com
504-617-2580 Cell
504-281-2512 Office
916-675-7827 Fax
[www. ccstb.org](http://www.ccstb.org)