

The True Spirit of the Season!

Dear Friend,

The holidays are a time of giving, but the devastation wrought in the Gulf Coast by this year's hurricane season allowed the whole country to exercise their generosity early! We have been touched and inspired by stories of communities and individuals leaping at the chance to help those in need, and thought you might like to hear a few stories too. Because we work by referral, we are connected to a national network of like-minded professionals who passed along some amazing tales of ordinary people giving of themselves in extraordinary ways.

We see it in the Finnegan family of San Mateo, California. John and Therese Finnegan traveled to Richmond, Texas, where they helped find housing for a displaced family who escaped from New Orleans with only the clothes on their backs. The Finnegans arranged for eight rental units to be made available, rent-free for a year, to the family—all 45 of them.

From around the nation, families, groups, communities, and individuals have extended helping hands to people whose lives have been uprooted, battered, and scattered by Katrina. This month's Item of Value highlights several such ordinary people whom disaster turned into heroes. Benton Gibson and sons led by example in repairing their community. Dan Bogojevich drove hundreds of miles to deliver supplies to New Orleans shelters twice, the second time riding out Rita with evacuees in a church. Katherine Breig worked from her home to rescue pets left behind and reunite them with owners. Lisa Vitello acquired a new family when she opened her home to evacuees.

These inspirational stories remind us in this holiday season that giving can be about so much more than traditional store-bought presents. This year, consider digging deep into your special reserve—yourself—to find gifts that both honor the need of the recipient and reflect the heart of the giver. You may be surprised to discover how much you have to give!

Sincerely,

Oh, by the way™... if you know of someone who would appreciate the level of service I provide, please call me with their name and business number and I will be happy to follow-up and take great care of them.



WHEN MOTHER NATURE'S AT HER WORST, HUMAN NATURE IS AT ITS BEST

The hurricanes that devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005 caused a humanitarian crisis not seen in the United States since the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. As we contemplate the grim statistics of lives lost and disrupted, it's important to know that many people saw the devastation as an opportunity to serve others. Here are four examples of ordinary people from around the country who jumped at the chance to help those in need by raising money, transporting supplies, sharing homes and generally, working hard. These inspiring individuals were transformed from "regular folks" into heroes. We hope reading their stories will light up your holidays!

RIDING OUT THE STORM TOGETHER

"This whole experience gave me an opportunity to take a step back... Life is not about material possessions. It's about people and family."

Dan Bogojevich, LTC (Ret) USAR, Chicago, Illinois

Dan Bogojevich of Chicago, Illinois, quickly grew tired of watching news coverage of the disaster in the Gulf states, and decided to do something about it. He and a friend loaded up a large truck with food, water and clothing and drove to Louisiana.

He was directed to the Office of Emergency Preparedness at the Baton Rouge airport, where he met the mayor of Zachery, a small town of 2,500 that had taken in 2,000 evacuees. As Dan unloaded his truckload of supplies at one of Zachery's shelters, he said, "There was a feeling of cheer and cooperation among the people. They told me that they were happy to have each other and were overjoyed to know people around the country were willing to help."

On September 22, Dan drove from Chicago with a second truckload of much needed supplies, arriving in Baton Rouge just hours before Hurricane Rita made landfall. He joined the rest of the community in Miracle Place Church to brace for the storm. "I was amazed at the serenity inside that church despite a hurricane raging all around us," he says. "We knew that all 350 of us—black and white, old and young, men and women—were in this together."



STEPPING IN AND STEPPING UP

"I'm proud of how we reacted as a community."

Benton Gibson, McComb, Mississippi

When the winds of Hurricane Katrina finally subsided in McComb, Mississippi, the Gibson family found a massive tree uprooted from the ground and punching through the side of their house. Benton Gibson then drove to his two offices to check on co-workers, and at one office he found a tree teetering atop the roof.

But Benton Gibson is not one to let setbacks stand in his way. Assessing the damage to the family home as "minimal," he turned his attention to the community. Rallying his four sons, ages 21 to 31, the Gibson team got to work scouring the neighborhood for tools. Then they went house to house clearing trees, cleaning debris and rebuilding rooftops. For weeks, their neighborhood relief efforts were made without phones or electricity. With the help of other citizens, the Gibson family cleared county roads, helped police direct traffic while traffic lights were out, and organized the housing of displaced individuals in churches and schools.

The Gibson family stepped up to serve their community by setting an example of tireless work and collaboration in the face of disaster.





NO CREATURES LEFT BEHIND

"In a time of uncertainty and chaos, the greatest gift we can give one another is compassion, understanding and love—the gift of ourselves. Knowing that a stranger is reaching out from miles away, giving themselves, is how we begin healing and moving forward."

Katherine Breig, Templeton, California

One of the many faces of tragedy from Hurricane Katrina was the separation of loved ones—including pets from their owners. Many evacuees were unable to take their pets with them, resulting in thousands of homeless animals in desperate need of food, shelter, medical care, and comfort. When Katherine Breig of Templeton, California, learned of the magnitude of the problem she got to work. A board member of the local Humane Society chapter, Katherine worked alongside other animal advocates to organize the rescue and fostering of these pets until the time of reuniting them with their original owners became possible. In addition to placing dogs and cats in safe, loving homes (Katherine adopted one kitty herself), she has also raised money to pay for veterinary care for rescued animals.

As of late September, more than 6,000 animals have been rescued and 400 reunited with owners, according to the Humane Society. Much work remains to be done, but with the help of animal lovers like Katherine, evacuees separated from pets during this holiday season can take comfort knowing they're in good hands.

Her passion for helping others is why Katherine made real estate her career, and helping people's animals seemed a natural way to show that she cares.

REACHING OUT AND DISCOVERING TREASURE WITHIN

Lisa Vitello, Marietta, Georgia

Although she lives far from the path of Hurricane Katrina, the storm hurled Lisa Vitello of Marietta, Georgia, into a whirlwind of action to help those who lost their homes. Just by opening her door, Lisa transformed her modest townhouse into a haven of refuge for two single moms from New Orleans.

Co-workers at the New Orleans 911 dispatch center, these displaced women were working the graveyard shift when the water began to rise. They made their way across the city in boats and on foot, moving from one dangerous situation to another, finally hitching a ride to safety... in Atlanta. They found their way to a hotel, and were preparing for their journey home to reunite with family, when Lisa and her circle of friends stepped in to lend a hand. They provided the two families with clothes, hugs and home-cooked meals, and in addition quickly raised money for airfare so they could return to New Orleans to retrieve what remained of their belongings.

Back home, the women found themselves trapped again—this time by Hurricane Rita. The women called Lisa, who drove her SUV to the rescue to help them pack their belongings.

In Marietta, Lisa invited one of the mothers and her daughter to stay with her—allowing them to get back on their feet. (The other woman moved to Texas to be with family.) The daughter is back in school, and Lisa has energized her circle to help the newcomers by setting up job interviews and raising money to fund their new life. As she reflected on this story, Lisa was struck by how many resources she didn't know she had until they were called upon. A committed sponsor of healthcare fundraisers, she discovered a whole new level of generosity, resilience, perseverance and care within herself and her friends.

Oh, by the way™... You can brighten the holidays and bring joy to children whose homes and lives were devastated by the hurricanes. Children's Network International is putting together Christmas parties for kids in New Orleans, Bay St. Louis, and Gulfport. Go to www.childrensnetworkinternational.org and click on "Make a Donation." In the comments section, write "Katrina Christmas Parties." **Happy Giving!**

In Case of Emergency (ICE) Cards

Use the In Case of Emergency (ICE) cards below to inform your family and friends of your emergency contact information. Carry one with you, and distribute them to your friends and family, so a designated relative or next of kin can be easily identified in an emergency situation.

EMERGENCY CONTACT

My name is _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

ICE Name _____

Relationship _____

Phone _____

EMERGENCY CONTACT

My name is _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

ICE Name _____

Relationship _____

Phone _____

EMERGENCY CONTACT

My name is _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

ICE Name _____

Relationship _____

Phone _____