



# Bar's Response to Hurricane Katrina

When Hurricane Katrina's 140 mph winds and 25 foot storm surge struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast on August 29th, it changed lives forever. Lawyers were not immune. Approximately 900 lawyers are listed on the Bar's rolls in the three coastal counties. Hurricane Katrina impacted every lawyer and law firm in Hancock, Harrison and Jackson Counties in some way.

On the morning of Monday, August 29th, I was at the Hilton Hotel in Jackson for the Bar's scheduled make-up of the 2005 Summer School for Lawyers that had been cancelled due to Hurricane Dennis. At 11:00 am the power went out at the Hilton and the seminar was once again cancelled. At the time no one had any idea of the devastation being wrought on the gulf coast. On Tuesday morning several Bar staffers and I arrived at the Bar Center to find no power and water damage to one office. Miraculously around 11:00 am on Tuesday, power was restored to the Bar Center and we immediately began to assess the situation on the coast and began efforts to respond.

While the Bar Center had power and phone connections on Tuesday, it did not have Internet and e-mail connections. It took several days for the connections to be reestablished and for the Bar's website to be converted into a valuable source of information and resources for Katrina victims. Thanks to several "regulars" on the Bar's SoloNet listserv, the listserv also became a valuable source of information on the whereabouts of gulf coast lawyers.

By the weekend following Katrina, the Bar Center was fully operational and the Bar staff and many volunteers were hard at work on the Bar's response to Katrina. The Bar's Young Lawyers Division immediately activated its disaster response system and began to gear up to serve the legal

needs of the thousands of Mississippians devastated by Katrina. Amanda Jones of Jackson, President of the YLD, was simply unbelievable in her commitment to see that the YLD did all it could to assist. Amanda, thanks to her firm of Bradley, Arant of Jackson, was full time at the Bar Center for eight weeks immediately following Katrina. Amanda's efforts along with the efforts of Associate Executive Director Melanie Henry were above and beyond the call of duty! For a detailed report of the YLD effort, please see Amanda's article on page 14 in this issue of *The Mississippi Lawyer*.

While the Young Lawyers Division was leading the effort to assist the public, the Bar staff was feverishly trying to assist the lawyers devastated by Katrina. Initially the fact that the President of the Bar, Joy Phillips, and Bar Foundation President Rodger Wilder were both from Gulfport, was a problem in that we could not communicate with them. MB President-Elect York Craig and MBF President-Elect Nina Tollison both stepped in and provided leadership until communications could be established with Joy and Rodger. While it was a problem at first, in the end, it was a blessing to have Joy and Rodger on the coast to be the Bar's "eyes and ears" as we responded to the needs of lawyers on the coast.

Through *Bar Briefs* and the Bar's website [www.msbar.org](http://www.msbar.org), you have seen much about the Bar's response to Katrina. The outpouring of support has been so great I would like to briefly re-cap the Bar's efforts.

**Katrina Lawyers Relief Fund.** The week after Katrina struck, the Bar and Bar Foundation created the Hurricane Katrina Lawyers Relief Fund and began to solicit

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## Executive Director's Message



Larry Houchins  
Executive Director of The Mississippi Bar

“Hurricane Katrina impacted every lawyer and law firm in Hancock, Harrison and Jackson Counties in some way.”

## Executive Director's Message continued...

donations. To date, over \$280,000 has been donated to the fund by lawyers, law firms, Bar Associations, Bar Foundations and other legal groups from Mississippi and from 30 other states!

**Guidance on Ethical Issues.** The Bar's leadership met with the Mississippi Supreme Court the week after Katrina and discussed issues related to Katrina. The Supreme Court, under Chief Justice Smith's leadership, was quick to respond to virtually all of the Bar's requests of assistance, guidance, etc. As a result, numerous orders were issued regarding admissions, advancement of funds, mandatory Continuing Legal Education, etc.

**Website.** Immediately following Katrina, the Bar's website was converted to a Katrina Resource/Information site. Important notices regarding court closings, disaster assistance information, and links to other sites with valuable disaster assistance information were all maintained on the site.

**Bulletin Board.** The Bar established an electronic Bulletin Board on the Bar's website where lawyers impacted by Katrina could post needs and others could answer and /or offer resources. Lawyers from all over the country offered office space, homes, and equipment through the Bar's electronic Bulletin Board.

**Bar Briefs.** The Bar's weekly e-newsletter was used extensively following Katrina to communicate with members of the Bar as to resources, needs, etc.

**Insurance Law Seminar.** Thanks to the hard work of Gulfport attorney Mike Holleman and the hospitality of the

Imperial Palace, the Bar was able to facilitate the hosting of a free remote Internet broadcast of an Insurance Law seminar sponsored by the well respected national CLE provider, Practice Law Institute (PLI). Over 125 gulf coast lawyers attended the seminar.

**Disaster Recovery Seminar.** Thanks to volunteers from several other states, the Bar, in cooperation with the Louisiana Bar and Gilsbar, was able to hold a free Disaster Recovery Seminar at the Harrison

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County Courthouse to assist lawyers with questions regarding technology, data recovery, ethical issues, malpractice issues, law office management, and even psychological issues. Over 80 lawyers attended the day long seminar. A special note of thanks is due Chancellor Jim Persons for making the Harrison County Courthouse available for the seminar.

**Office Resource Centers.** The Board of Commissioners authorized the establishment of four Office Resource Centers along the coast for lawyers to use who had lost their offices. The Centers consisted of

three or four computers, printers, internet access, e-mail access, Casemaker access and word processing software. Jackson lawyer and author, Luther Munford, donated copies of his Appellate Practice book for each center and the Bar included Bar Directories for each center. The centers were set up in Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi and Pascagoula.

**Office Furniture.** Through the efforts of Joy Phillips and Mike Holleman, the Bar was able to secure warehouse space in Gulfport to receive furniture donations. The Miami law firm of Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson generously donated (and transported to Gulfport) a truckload of office furniture. Just a few weeks ago the Minnesota Bar delivered a truckload of furniture donated by Minnesota lawyers.

**Computers.** The Jackson law firm of Baker Donelson donated 30-40 computers and the Bar transported them to the coast. Harrison County Chancery Clerk John McAdams allowed them to be stored in vacant space at the Gulfport Courthouse and his staff secured the computers and controlled access.

**Business Suits.** Joy Phillips coordinated donations of women's business suits from Libby Murr, a representative for Don Caster. Suits were distributed to over 20 gulf coast women lawyers. Thanks to President-Elect York Craig's contacts with his church's relief effort, he was able to obtain 30 men's suits from The Rogue. The suits were transported to the coast by MB General Counsel Adam Kilgore and initially distributed at a meeting of the Harrison County Bar. Suits are still available through the Chancery Clerk's office in Gulfport.

Somehow "thank you" doesn't seem to be enough, but on behalf of the 6,600 lawyers in Mississippi and especially on behalf of the almost 900 lawyers on the Gulf coast, I say "Thank You" to all Bar leaders, Bar volunteers, lawyers, Bar staff in Mississippi, as well as to all the lawyers, law firms, bar associations, bar foundations and legal organizations from across the U.S. that offered assistance and generously made donations to assist the lawyers on the Mississippi Gulf Coast that were devastated by Hurricane Katrina. ■

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