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"THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE"

Thousands feared dead from Katrina's wrath

Special to Sentinel-Voice

NEW ORLEANS — With thousands feared drowned in what could be America's deadliest natural disaster, New Orleans' leaders all but surrendered the streets to floodwaters Wednesday and began turning out the lights on the ruined city — perhaps for months.

Looting spiraled so out of control that Mayor Ray Nagin ordered virtually the entire police force to abandon search-and-rescue efforts and focus on the brazen packs of thieves who turned increasingly hostile.

Nagin called for an all-out evacuation of the city's remaining residents. Asked how many people

died, he said: "Minimum, hundreds. Most likely, thousands."

With most of the city under water, Army engineers struggled to plug New Orleans' breached levees with giant sandbags and concrete barriers, and authorities drew up plans to clear out the tens of thousands of remaining people and practically abandon the below-sea-level city. Most of the evacuees — including thousands who suffered in the hot and muggy Superdome — were moved to the Astrodome in Houston, 350 miles away.

There will be a "total evacuation of the city. We have to. The city will not be functional for two or three months," Nagin said. And he said



An aerial view of the devastation caused by high winds and heavy flooding in the greater New Orleans area following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, La., on Tuesday. Floodwaters engulfed much of New Orleans as officials feared a steep death toll and planned to evacuate thousands remaining in shelters after the historic city's defenses were breached by Hurricane Katrina. Damage estimates are expected to top \$25 billion. (Left photo) Residents inspect damage left by Hurricane Katrina in Biloxi, Mississippi.



people would not be allowed back into their homes for at least a month or two.

If the mayor's death-toll estimate holds true, it would make Katrina the worst natural disaster in the United States since at least the

1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, which have blamed for anywhere from about 500 to 6,000 deaths. Katrina would also be the nation's deadliest hurricane since 1900, when a storm in Galveston, Texas, killed between 6,000 and

12,000 people.

In Mississippi, bodies are starting to pile up at the morgue in hard-hit Harrison County. Forty corpses have brought to the morgue already, and officials expect the death toll

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Looting despite police presence

Special to Sentinel-Voice

With much of the city flooded by Hurricane Katrina, looters floated garbage cans filled with clothing and jewelry down the street in a dash to grab what they could. In some cases, looting on Tuesday took place in full view of police and National Guard troops.

At a Walgreen's drug store in the French Quarter, people were running out with grocery baskets and coolers full of soft drinks, chips and diapers.

When police finally showed up, a young boy stood in the door screaming, "86! 86!" — the radio code for police — and the crowd scattered.

Denise Bollinger, a tourist from Philadelphia, stood outside and snapped pictures in amazement.

"It's downtown Baghdad," the housewife said. "It's insane. I've wanted to come here for 10 years. I thought this was a sophisticated city. I guess not."

Around the corner on Canal Street, the main thoroughfare in the central business district, people slogged headlong through hip-deep water as looters ripped open the steel gates on the front of several clothing and jewelry stores.

One man, who had about 10 pairs of jeans draped over his left arm, was asked if he was salvaging things from his store.

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Two schools, one building: Booker, Williams share same space, for now

By Parker Philpot Sentinel-Voice

The ground at 2277 Martin Luther King Blvd where Kermit Booker Elementary once stood is being reworked for a future, beautified resurrection. Meanwhile, two schools are drawn together, sharing, in an experiment in cooperative education: Booker students and staff are housed for the school year at the Wendell P. Williams Elementary School campus at 1030 "J" St. On Monday, the first day of the school year, participants called it an early success.

The genesis of the unusual, but moving ar-

angement has both schools conducting full day classes on the same land, while maintaining each school's individuality, until the Booker team can return to its own turf and its redesigned, new school scheduled for completion in 2007.

And it really is a moving experience: Students relocated from Booker are eligible for district paid transportation on buses allocated to get them safely to Williams everyday, less than a mile away.

The greatest challenge on the first day of school? Booker's Principal Beverly Mathis said, "Transportation." Campus Security Monitor Susan Booker ech-

oed that and explained: "It's a big change for everybody... It's probably going to take about a week," as she encouraged parents to register their children to ride on the busses.

Mathis was optimistic, looking forward to a "wonderful" stay for the year on the shared campus. So, too, was Principal Brenda McKinney in her second year presiding at Williams.

"We are all in this together, and we're going to make it work," McKinney said assuredly and cheerfully.

"It's not so bad," Mathis said. "They were so great," she added, referring to the welcome she and her kids received, and also referring

to her "great" Booker students and their reputation for team work.

Mathis, who had little time on Day One outside of watchfully overseeing the settlement and safety of her almost 400 children into their new classroom accommodations: large portables on the spacious lot of Williams (with some inside building rooms for pre-K) and ample yard space where the children line-up and are led to their assigned buses.

Mathis was busy but happy: "Thank you for a wonderful first day," she broadcast over the intercom at the close of the first

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