

New Orleans parish faces shaky future

NEW ORLEANS (AP) - Mass at one of the nation's oldest Black Roman Catholic parishes was filled with jazzy renditions of gospel songs and prayers that church officials would reverse their decision to merge it with another parish, a move prompted by the financial strain of Hurricane Katrina.

"A parish is family. A parish is generations. A parish is your history," said Sandra Gordon, who began attending St. Augustine Church as a child, after Hurricane Betsy wiped out her family's previous parish in 1965.

St. Augustine, founded in 1841 by slaves and free people of color, is among the

parishes the archdiocese plans to consolidate as it seeks to deal with \$84 million in uninsured losses.

The archdiocese is careful to point out that St. Augustine's will only close as a parish but will still be open for Mass on Sundays and some other functions like funerals and weddings.

Its building suffered only wind damage from Katrina and will remain open. "Show up on Sunday, and you won't miss a beat," said the Rev. William Maestri, a spokesman for the archdiocese.

But members of the parish, though, say it's not enough. They officially appealed the decision to the

Archdiocese of New Orleans on Thursday and expect a response Monday.

St. Augustine sits in a low- to middle-income, racially diverse neighborhood near the French Quarter. The music, this Sunday, played by Ellis and Branford Marsalis, is jazz. About half of the 350 pre-Katrina families that belonged to the parish have returned, and many have suffered heavy damage to their homes, including Gordon.

"This is a very, very heavy cross for us to carry right now," said Gordon, likening the parish's struggle to the Friday before Jesus' resurrection. "The church will be res-

urrected. We will have the victory."

Hundreds of structures in the archdiocese, including schools, churches and administrative buildings, were damaged when the storm blew in Aug. 29 and four-fifths of the city was covered in water. Many at the church note how important the church is historically.

It was founded by slaves and free Blacks with the blessing of the archdiocese and birthed the second order of Black nuns in the United States in 1842. It was largely a parish of Italian immigrants in the early 1900s but morphed back into a predominantly Black church in

the 1960s as White residents left the Treme neighborhood.

Its long history in New Orleans means many of the city's Black residents have some tie to St. Augustine, which was standing room only on Sunday.

Troi Bechet, a 44-year-old who belongs to another par-

ish, went on Sunday to St. Augustine to show support.

"It's incredibly important in the African-American community historically," said Bechet, who's had several family members baptized at St. Augustine. "It also brings together the community."



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Helen Murphy, left, listens to a guest at her exhibit.

Photographer

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seen around town at various galleries and several of her works were selected by a designer for the cover art of two spiritual music CD's.

"Right now, I do have one piece that is in the [Contemporary Arts Collective] on Charleston and Main street. That is a juried event; mine was not juried... and it is on exhibit there right now."

The piece there is called "On the Flip Side" and it is a photo of a peacock's plumage from the reverse.

Murphy's photographs were also displayed as part of the "Keepers of the Flame" exhibit which was done in conjunction with the Las Vegas Centennial Celebration. She also has some photos on display locally at the Left of Center Gallery.

Murphy also works as a portrait photographer. In addition, Murphy does custom matting and framing.

She hosts workshops, open to the public, to teach matting and framing. Her workshops are held at Black Mountain recreation center in Henderson.

Most of the selections in the "Africa: Journey of Adventure" exhibit will be on sale to the public at the conclusion of the exhibit's run. For more information call the center at (702) 229-4800.

Xavier, other HBCU's try to rebuild

By Henry Allen Hurst
Special to Sentinel-Voice

BALTIMORE (NNPA) - Six months after Xavier University's campus was flooded in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and little more than a month of reopening, Xavier University is recovering without federal aid, yet is operating at almost full capacity.

According to Xavier officials, about 75 percent of the students who were enrolled there this past fall, before hurricanes, have returned to campus for the spring semes-

Emerald

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At last year's Emerald Ball, seven students received scholarships for an aggregate \$12,000. Organizers said that scholarship recipients have used the aid for better education and careers.

"They all went on to college and have been successful," Rogers said.

"This year there will be seven, again," Selma said. The sorority plans to increase their awards through increased attendance at its event and more donors.

The organization's sorors encourage and welcome the scholarship recipients to follow their lead in giving back through providing community service.

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. was the first Greek-letter organization of Black college women. Founded in 1908, it is now a

ter, but \$25 million is still needed for repairs and renovations.

"Our recovery efforts are going well, and we're rebuilding the university as an island in the city," said Norman Francis, Xavier University president, describing the surrounding community "dead."

However, at Southern University of New Orleans, recovery is much slower as FEMA trailers have been set up as classroom buildings, and students without housing are temporarily being put up

network of more than 170,000 members worldwide providing volunteer service.

For more information or for tickets call (702) 233-3832 or send e-mail to opinc254@aol.com.

Tasha Pope contributed to this article.

at the New Orleans Marriott Hotel.

Although 2,000 students have returned to Dillard University, about 80 percent of the returning students are being housed at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside Hotel, and the ballrooms of the hotels have been made into classroom space.

"We've spent \$35 million and growing for damages to the university," said Xavier University's Associate Vice President and University Media Relations Warren Bell. "We're still waiting for federal monies, but we have started a capital campaign until that kicks in," said Bell.

City officials said \$850 million of university funds have been spent on rebuilding the three HBCU's.

"As I have said before, every time we open our doors, it's a miracle," said Francis, addressing returning

faculty at the first academic assembly since the storm hit in late August.

"Well, I can tell you that opening our doors this time was the biggest miracle of all. We recognize that some things are still not exactly the way we want them, but with a little patience, understanding, and sacrifice, we will get through this challenge. You have to go through Good Friday to get to Easter Sunday," Francis said.

Francis, along with other faculty, staff, and students, lost his own house in the flood, and said that the university still faces tremendous financial challenges in making all the necessary campus repairs. At least \$25 million needed from FEMA assistance and from congressional assistance, the university will receive settlements from in-

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Mr. J's Fish Market



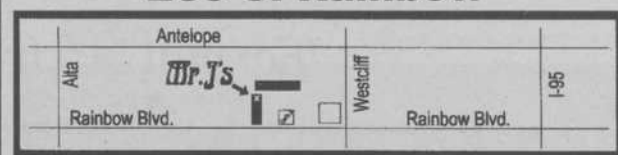
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Correction

In Volume 26, Issue 45, March 9, 2006, Debbie Conway was misidentified in her picture.