



William L. Minnix, Jr., President and CEO

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From Katrina to Christina

You may be tired of hearing about Hurricane Katrina. I'm no social scientist, but I believe that "tragedy fatigue" sets in after a while. Even the most sensitive of people become immune to bad news. That's why celebrity shenanigans fill up so much media space so quickly. "Tragedy fatigue" gets the better of us, and we put bad situations out of our mind through mindless, relatively unimportant diversions like who's entered rehab or shaved her head or fathered a child.

"Tragedy fatigue" happens when bad news seems so pervasive or a situation so overwhelming or a predicament so hopeless.

What's the cure for "tragedy fatigue?" People like Leslie Knight, an AAHSA regional vice president, her friend Christina Karamesines and our members in the Gulf States. People who don't give up and who show up to help.

Recently, Leslie visited our New Orleans members for a week to lend a hand and spread hope. She took Christina Karamesines with her. Christina, who is from Michigan, is a massage therapist and is blind. They stayed at Lambeth House, one of our New Orleans members. A great story there of survival, revival and endurance for Scott Crabtree and the residents, staff, volunteers and board.

Christina set up shop and offered free massages to our members for an entire week. Leslie says Christina has quite the healing touch. One of our leaders, John Tieperman of Chateau de Notre Dame and Wyndhoven Retirement Apartments, had suffered a brain aneurysm last September and has miraculously recovered. Leslie said John "looked like a different person after Christina worked on him."

Leslie's meetings surfaced the daily challenges of a mammoth recovery: inadequate medical services, a crazy insurance market, slow and uncoordinated government response, preparation for the next disaster. There are stories like Melanie Baker's, director of nursing (DON) at Chateau de Notre Dame. She's serving as DON, charge nurse and occasional certified nursing assistant while her organization struggles to find enough staff to meet needs. She couldn't even find time to make her own massage appointment! All of this

occurs in an atmosphere of not knowing the long-term fate of a great city. Eighteen months after Katrina, there are still blocks and blocks of destroyed homes and businesses.

Yet, in the middle of the tragedy fatigue, there is hope and growth. People like Dennis Adams are finding creative ways to capitalize low-income housing. Karen Contrenchis, the Gulf States executive, still works hard knitting together complex political pieces while living in her FEMA trailer. She, with the help of AAHSA staff, is planning the Gulf States annual meeting. The National Caucus and Center on Black Aged worked with Leslie and AAHSA's Colleen Bloom to help relocate a nursing home resident closer to her family.

Members are getting creative together on recruitment and retention of employees. AAHSA staff like Barbara Manard continue to escort religious groups to the area to muck out one house at a time. Catholic Charities, Wyndhoven, Volunteers of America, National Church Residences, National Baptist Convention U.S.A., Inc. and St. James Place of Baton Rouge are working on their strategic plans. The Association of Jewish Aging Services will hold its meeting in New Orleans in a few weeks to show their support — just like they did in New York after Sept. 11.

And people like Christina will continue to show up in New Orleans with healing hands to "massage" our friends and colleagues through this difficult time. They remind us that tragedy fatigue is an unacceptable state of affairs.

Thank God that for every Katrina we face in life, there are Christinas to help us hope again.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Larry', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

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