

A Story of Resilience

By Robin A. Barnes

A decade after Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans shares its resiliency initiatives

Living with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina—and the specter of each new hurricane season—has taught those who live in and visit New Orleans the important difference between recovery and resilience.

While recovery is about getting back to the status quo after a disaster, resilience is about something bigger. For New Orleans residents and civic leaders, it is about recognizing that sea level rise, climate, flooding and subsidence are ongoing threats to human safety, public health, the economy, quality of life and culture.

Building resilience places emphasis on anticipating, preparing for, responding to and—most importantly—adapting to disasters and other shocks and disturbances, and integrating strong policies supporting resilience into all public systems, as well as changing the culture to one of “living with water.”

The city of New Orleans understands that the unifying thread to the challenges it faces is largely about water management, which has moved beyond theory and now is being implemented in policy and planning initiatives throughout the region. This sector also is a driver of the city’s local economy.

Investment, Plans, Policy Leadership & Industry

To commemorate the progress New Orleans has made on this front in the 10 years since Hurricane Katrina, consider these 10 signs that New Orleans is resilient:

1. A \$14.5 billion levee and pumping system offers 100-year hurricane protection and is one significant element of the region’s robust approach to climate adaptation and resilience.
2. Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, the Louisiana Legislature created the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) and tasked it with coordinating local, state and federal efforts to achieve comprehensive coastal

protection and restoration. CPRA developed the Louisiana Coastal Master Plan to focus efforts and guide actions needed to sustain Louisiana’s coastal ecosystem, safeguard coastal populations and protect vital economic and cultural resources. This 50-year, \$50 billion plan will benefit from the RESTORE Act, which directs 80% of fines from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill to repairing the ecosystem it damaged.

3. The Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan directly addresses groundwater and storm water as critical factors in shaping a safer, more livable and economically vibrant southeast Louisiana, which averages more than 60 in. of rainfall each year. The Urban Water Plan seeks to work in tandem and create multiple lines of defense with the existing levee system and the Louisiana Coastal Master Plan. Administered by Greater New Orleans Inc., the \$2.5 million plan was funded by the Louisiana Office of Community Development’s Disaster Recovery Unit. A New Orleans firm, Waggoner & Ball Architects, led a team of local and international water management experts, including Dutch experts, to develop the Urban Water Plan, which was released in September 2013.
4. The city of New Orleans hired its first chief resiliency officer (CRO) as part of a global effort called 100 Resilient Cities, an initiative pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation that helps communities prepare for the social and economic stresses that threaten urban areas. The CRO is charged with developing and implementing a plan that addresses “rising sea levels, strategies for flood mitigation and protection, including coastal restoration projects and improvements in emergency response planning, as well as ensuring new and existing structures and developments are able to withstand a variety of weather-related events.”
5. Recently, the Sewerage and Water Board of New

Orleans announced the launch of a new Green Infrastructure Program as part of a larger evolution in public policy regarding management of water in southeast Louisiana.

6. The draft Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance under review by the New Orleans City Council includes an innovative emphasis on landscape and storm water management. This policy will change the landscape of New Orleans; for example, it will require the incorporation of storm water best management practices, such as the inclusion of permeable pavement to reduce water runoff in future capital projects.
7. Recognizing the absence of a unified voice from the greater business community advocating for coastal restoration, and with funding from the Walton Family Foundation, Greater New Orleans Inc. created the Coalition for Coastal Resilience and Economy. This neutral, non-partisan group of leaders from the southeast Louisiana business community is positioned as an informed, educated voice of advocacy for sustainable restoration efforts in Louisiana's wetlands, rivers, delta and coastline, and will work to ensure optimization of coastal restoration efforts for economic gains such as employing a local workforce.
8. Building on growing momentum around water management, a new collaborative of individuals, organizations and communities working to address critical water issues throughout New Orleans and the surrounding region has been formed. The work of the Greater New Orleans Water Collaborative is guided by the vision and principles of the Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan and is focused on developing a vision for a safer and more beautiful city built upon sustainable water management.
9. Local colleges and universities are adopting curricula that will educate and train a workforce specializing in water management; the University of New Orleans' new Coastal Engineering & Science Certificate program, funded in part by Latter & Blum, has registered its inaugural class. Delgado Community College is establishing a training program funded by the GE Foundation that focuses on water management skills. There are many other educational assets throughout Louisiana that support the training of this growing sector.
10. Policy and community

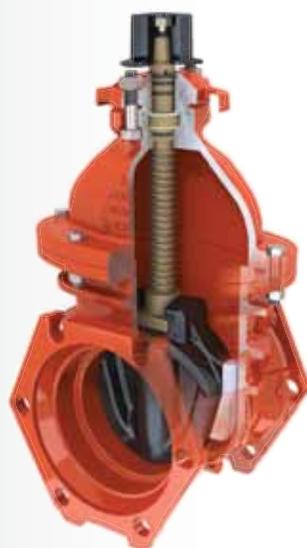
momentum is prompting local firms and startup companies to specialize in new technologies and materials. Localized innovation and expansion within a burgeoning emerging environmental market have national and global reach. The emerging environmental industry sector includes companies that help other companies and governments create jobs by addressing environmental challenges. An expertise in disaster recovery, for example, developed and honed since Hurricane Katrina, has landed Louisiana companies more than \$300 million in Hurricane Sandy prime contracts.

New Orleans was named one of the Top 10 Cities in the World by *Travel + Leisure* magazine. *Site Selection* magazine ranked Louisiana No. 2 in the U.S. for business climate, showing that resilience is good for business. The city has turned the corner from a focus on recovery to being resilient. New Orleans is able to thrive with a base grounded in the ability to adapt to change and calamity. The city is ready to share its expertise with the world. **w&wd**

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