

5th Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina

Kristie Shoulders

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina destroyed thousands of homes and countless livelihoods of New Orleans, Louisiana. As the levee system failed and the city flooded, more than 1,800 people lost their lives. Even after five years, the struggle for renewal continues. For eight days this past summer, nearly 500 high school People to People Leadership Alumni from all over the nation traveled to this injured city to serve, learn, and spread encouragement through action to the resilient residents of New Orleans. Wooster Twp. Elementary teacher, Kristie Shoulders worked as an Academic Primary Leader on the campus of Tulane University guiding these students through an intense program. Throughout the week delegates worked on service projects from Habitat for Humanity homes in the Lower Ninth Ward, refurbishing Dibert Elementary School to rescuing overgrown yards from possible \$100 fines. It was very depressing to see so many skeletal homes still standing exactly how they were post Katrina.

Our leadership skills were challenged, enriched, and inspired through renowned guest speakers. General Russel L. Honore, USA (Ret), Commander of Task Force Katrina, spoke on preparedness in the 21st Century as well as Tom Piazza, author of the award-winning book *Why New Orleans Matter*, shared his observations. We saw extraordinary photographs and heard riveting stories from storm chaser Jim Reed. Film director Spike Lee discussed his documentary *When the Levees Broke*. Condoleezza Rice, former U.S. Secretary of State, delivered an exquisite speech describing pivotal leadership skills derived from her education and international career.

The most harrowing stories were told by the Katrina victims and rescue workers who opened their hearts and shared their traumatic, personal survival stories. We concluded the week with a Mardi Gras-style gala and listened to Super Bowl MVPs Peyton and Eli Manning about their passion for their hometown and what leadership means to them. The crescent city is a cultural icon within itself; seasoned with Cajun, echoes of Jazz, and a few of those famous beignets.

