



Community Spotlight: Gulfport, Mississippi

Fostering Community Resilience on the Mississippi Gulf Coast

by Tom Lansford and Ann Olsen, CARRI-Gulfport Team (July 2009)

2009 is a transformative year for both the Community and Regional Resilience Institute (CARRI) and its local affiliate on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. The University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast (USM) has undertaken a year-long project designed to capture the resilience lessons in the post- Hurricane Katrina environment, while utilizing the knowledge gained from the integration of academic research and community stakeholder involvement. With the transition of CARRI from an initiative to a national institute focused on building and disseminating the language of resilience, USM continues to adapt its agenda based on emergent knowledge, presenting a fresh perspective on local and regional resilience challenges.

USM has created the Center for Policy and Resilience (CPR) to support research and other appropriate programs on policy matters and community resilience. The Center will facilitate research and interdisciplinary exchanges between USM faculty and students, as well as policy makers at the community and regional level and both non-governmental and private volunteer organizations. It will also serve as a clearinghouse for grants and external funding related to policy and resilience studies for USM Gulf Coast operations and as a catalyst for community outreach and education programs. In addition to its role in the broader CARRI effort and serving as a resource to promote resilience in the region, the Center will host an annual conference and sponsor the publication of the journal *Global Horizons* (a biannual publication). The first annual conference, Ghosts of Katrina, was held June 5-6, 2009. Participants included 40 academic and community panelists.

Current CPR efforts include research support and program evaluation for the Mississippi Gulf Coast Youth Development Coalition. Building on this work, CPR will develop additional outreach efforts that enhance those already underway. Potential outreach activities include engaging in service learning projects, organizing conferences, public speaking events, a research-based lecture series, and student internship and study-travel opportunities. For instance, on October 2, 2009, CPR will sponsor an undergraduate and graduate student symposium to foster research and cross-disciplinary collaboration on resiliency.

In conjunction with the formation of CPR, the CARRI Gulfport Team has undertaken a book length project *Fostering Community Resilience: Homeland Security, Hurricane Katrina and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*. Scheduled for completion in the fall/ winter of 2009, the book focuses on

the development and evolution of the Department of Homeland Security in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Through the lens of the national response to Hurricane Katrina and the local lens of the recovery of the Mississippi Gulf Coast community now three years in the making, this work attempts to clarify the particular qualities that make a community and a nation more resilient. To achieve this goal, the work starts by focusing on the evolution of Homeland Security within the United States up through the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and its myopic focus on terrorism.

By highlighting the successes and failures of the federal response to Hurricane Katrina and a federal refocus on the language of resilience, the work will draw together lessons learned from the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The bulk of the work will explore the Mississippi Gulf Coast from impact to recovery to resilience with a focus on the unique economic, social, infrastructure and political circumstances that make the Gulf Coast a resilient community. Through the personal accounts of local leaders and a thorough exploration of the circumstances experienced over the last several years, a more complete understanding of Homeland Security and how it impacts the Mississippi Gulf Coast will be developed.

In addition, the CARRI Gulfport Team will write a series of white papers designed to specifically capture the local knowledge generated over the past several years of recovery. From the use of text messaging as the only reliable line of communication in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina through the formation of collaborative efforts such as the Mississippi Gulf Coast Business Council and the Knight Nonprofit Center, Gulfport has many valuable insights to offer as a community in recovery that can be transferred to other local communities across the nation.

The community involvement process begun in 2008 with the formation of the CARRI Gulfport Advisory Group continues this year. Three teams completed development of roadmaps toward increased resilience in these areas: communication and collaboration across sectors, individual and family resilience and preparedness, and affordability of housing. Each roadmap offers a vision of a future state characterized by enhanced community resilience, a set of initiatives to move toward that future state, and one or more specific recommended actions for each initiative. The Advisory Group has established priorities among the initiatives and actions and currently supports efforts in two of the focus areas. A Resilient Home Building Conference is planned for early 2010, and Advisory Group members are considering ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the collecting, updating, and sharing of directory information about nonprofits and other groups engaged in disaster preparation, response, and recovery.

In addition, several members of the CARRI Gulfport community participated in the CARRI Community Forum held in Charleston SC in April. Mark Ashley, Operations Officer, Naval Construction Battalion Center-Gulfport; Roberta Avila, Executive Director, Interfaith Disaster Task Force; Dr. John Kelly, Chief Administrative Officer, City of Gulfport; and Adele Lyons, Biloxi Program Director, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation each presented perspectives on community resilience and participated in the discussions with panelists from two other CARRI partner communities. Gulfport Mayor Brent Warr also joined the Mayors' Panel at the Forum.

With the continuation of the community involvement process and the addition of the Center for Policy and Resilience, CARRI Gulfport is well equipped to advance CARRI's missions to learn about resilience and enhance the resilience of U.S. communities.