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HURRICANE KATRINA 20 YEARS LATER

Rescue missions changed lives



A car is partially buried in mud in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina's reign of destruction along the U.S. Gulf Coast in August 2005. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JOHN MCDERMOTT

Deacon postponed his retirement to help aid victims with Chemung/Schuyler Catholic Charities

Jeff Murray Elmira Star-Gazette | USA TODAY NETWORK

It was August 2005 and John McDermott had just wrapped up a career with Eastman-Kodak in Rochester, and was looking forward to retirement. ● McDermott had also recently been ordained as a deacon in the Catholic Diocese of Rochester, and it was in that capacity that he had to put retirement plans on hold when he was called back into service — this time to help coordinate a massive effort to help churches and residents along the U.S. Gulf Coast recover from the overwhelming destruction of Hurricane Katrina. ● McDermott worked with Catholic Charities of Chemung/Schuyler, which was helping coordinate local response, and before long he was on the ground in Louisiana. ● It was an experience that is still vivid in his memory 20 years later.

“There were piles of dirt, houses slated for demolition. One picture that will stick with me forever — a big, beautiful church, completely flooded out,” McDermott said. “A plank was hurled through the air and pierced the roof of the church. It was sticking down like a giant spear. It really was an emotional thing.”

Helping churches and others recover from nature’s fury

McDermott said he was tapped by the Catholic Diocese and Catholic Charities to coordinate response to Katrina’s devastation because of his management experience, but he also had plenty of help.

Kathy Dubel, director of justice and peace for Catholic Charities of Chemung/Schuyler, was in that same role in 2005 and served as a liaison between area churches and their counterparts in storm-ravaged areas.

McDermott traveled to Elmira to consult with Dubel and others before heading south to the New Orleans area to meet with local church officials and see much of the destruction for himself.

“Catholic Charities USA identified parishes impacted by the hurricane seeking help and connected them with parishes around the country willing to help,” Dubel said.

“Once the two were connected, the conversation was between the impacted parish/pastor/staff and the Catholic Charities agency and the local parishes willing to help,” she said. “I served as the link for the local parishes and Catholic Charities of Chemung/Schuyler with the parish we were

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John McDermott, left, representing the Catholic Diocese of Rochester and Catholic Charities, meets with Father Ralph Carroll, pastor of St. Clement Church of Rome in Metairie, Louisiana, while helping coordinate recovery efforts for victims of Hurricane Katrina.

“I remember standing in a crowded room, and I was filled with so much joy. I am in a place where I can do what I know how to do for some good. It was a mixture of emotions.”

John McDermott

Steuben County man recalls ‘brutal work environment’ in recovery efforts

Jeff Smith
Corning Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK

Mike Krill arrived in Waveland, Mississippi to help with search and rescue efforts just 22 hours after Hurricane Katrina hit coastal Mississippi and the New Orleans area Aug. 29, 2005.

It’s a time he will never forget.

Krill, a retired Easton, Pa. Fire Department Chief who now lives in the Steuben County town of Savona, was a longtime member of Pennsylvania Task Force 1 who traveled to emergencies in nearly a dozen different U.S. states.

But he never saw anything like the damage caused by Katrina.

“We spent 28 days in coastal Mississippi and later New Orleans. It’s a time I will never forget,” Krill said. “I’ve been to a lot of disasters, in places like Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, North and South Carolina, Florida and others, but Katrina was definitely the worst.”

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Lower Ninth Ward still fighting its way back

Rick Jervis
USA TODAY

NEW ORLEANS – Concrete steps still stand sentry over empty lots here in the Lower Ninth Ward, their houses long washed away.

Overgrown lots outnumber grocery stores. Streets, once filled with the sounds of children playing or older folks playing dominoes, are mostly quiet, punctured occasionally by the sound of a distant lawn mower.

“Wasn’t always like this,” said Harry

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Note to readers

We will not be printing a paper on Monday, Sept. 1, but will be providing it to you via the eNewspaper. You can always find the latest news on our website, mobile app, newsletters and social media. Subscribers can access the eNewspaper by going to our website and clicking on eNewspaper in the black navigation bar.

