

Triumphing Over Adversity Along the Gulf Coast

by *Kenneth D. Wade*



As champions for strong communities and empowered neighbors, it is NeighborWorks® America's responsibility to do all we can to ensure that Gulf communities are rebuilt on the firmest foundation.

This issue of *Bright Ideas* features NeighborWorks® organizations and their partners in action, addressing the full range of needs in communities that are either rebuilding or pitching in to help those displaced by the hurricanes. Our work includes providing temporary and permanent housing; connecting evacuees to schools, health and social services; providing transportation, job banks and job training; using our rehab and construction expertise to repair and rebuild sound and healthy homes; and much more. These fundamental services help evacuees become self-sufficient and productive in a new life as quickly as possible.

The issues unfolding in the difficult rebuilding process have thrown into sharp relief the vulnerabilities and the powerful agents of change in communities. As we work in the Gulf, I am reminded that the Chinese symbol for crisis means "opportunity blowing on an ill wind." We must harness the national attention and resources and do more than just put up new structures. We also must create strong, vibrant communities with engaged, empowered citizens.

Our presence in more than 4,500 communities has provided plenty of lessons in effective planning, efficient use of resources, forging public-private partnerships, and engaging local citizens to shape neighborhoods that meet their needs for today and tomorrow.

In the spirit of spring and renewal, we present several stories of disaster relief and rebuilding in hopes that others can draw on lessons learned and seize the opportunities created in the wake of those ill winds of 2005. The following pages provide examples of communities finding new partners and innovative ways to rebuild neighborhoods to thrive for centuries.

The triumphs over adversity outlined in the following pages have also taught us something very important about the perseverance and positive will that thrive in our communities. You will read about community leaders who have declared, "yes we can, and yes we will, heal and begin anew." We are proud to witness and contribute to this productive determination and will.

Kenneth D. Wade is NeighborWorks® America's chief executive officer.