

Dead still being plucked from ravages of Katrina

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Marti Ackerman (third from left) with other volunteers at a shelter in Louisiana.

visited New Orleans and witnessed the destruction in the Ninth Ward neighborhood. "I also went to a town called Eden Isles — it doesn't really exist anymore. We're talking piles of debris that's 10 feet tall that runs the entire length of the road and that's as long as 10 miles. Houses were moved, destroyed and some just weren't there anymore. It took my breath away at how devastating it was.

It's almost incomprehensible to see where these people

lived and how they're gonna' rebuild their lives. I know that I helped. But it feels like a drop in the ocean."

Charleston resident Linda Ketner, a regular contributor to *Q-Notes* and the President of South Carolina Equality Coalition has also seen first hand the devastation left behind by Hurricane Katrina. Ketner and her partner Beth have made a handful of trips to the region — the first Sept. 27 through Oct. 4.

Ketner initially sent out a mass email to friends and acquaintances soliciting donations of goods and money. They packed up a U-Haul full and set off in search of people who needed help. They weren't too difficult to find.

"We worked all week in a town called Pass Christian," says Ketner. "The devastation [there] is almost total. It's like nothing I've ever seen or hope to see again.

8,200 of the 8,500 homes are gone — just completely gone. 300 homes are in some state of 'standing' but all except a handful are completely gutted."

According to Ketner, the town suffered a 30-foot-plus storm surge — with 33 known dead and more still missing.

"Many of the Pass Christian population are elsewhere for now," Ketner explains. "The 600-700 people living in town are living in various stages of awful. The middle class ones have small trailers or tents beside their gutted houses — or where their houses used to be. The poor are mostly sleeping out in the open under trees. This situation is going to last a long, long time."

At press time Linda and Beth had returned to Pass Christian and were not expecting to be back in Charleston before early November.

spared the brunt of the hurricane and the subsequent flooding some things are slowly returning to normal.

The city's popular predominantly gay district — the French Quarter — is such an example.

"You can walk through the French Quarter now and if you didn't know you'd never suspect that there had been such a devastating hurricane to hit the city," says Marti Ackerman, a Charlotte resident who volunteered with the Red Cross to help victims of the disaster. "Most of the businesses in this area are back open, although there are a few that are still boarded up."

According to Ackerman, large parts of the city have been devastated.

"I don't see how people who lived in the Ninth Ward neighborhood are ever going to be able to return home. It was one of the most horrific things I'd ever seen. They're still pulling bodies out and the smell of mold and death is everywhere. If you've ever seen pictures of Hiroshima — that's what it looks like. Everything is grey — with dried mud on top of vehicles. Houses with holes. There's just so much destruction."

Ackerman is the partner of architectural designer Robbie Warren, who was profiled in *Q-Notes'* Q-Living section in August. Warren had hoped to join in Ackerman on the trip last month, but previous commitments prevented her from going.

A former resident of Metairie, La., Ackerman says she feels a deep connection for the area. "With the sheer mass of destruction and devastation we felt it was our job on a humanitarian level to do something. I was fortunate enough to be able to take the time to go down there. It was like a moral and spiritual obligation. It would have been inconceivable not to go."

Ackerman says she was deployed with the Red Cross for three weeks. First to Baton Rouge and then to Covington outside of Slidell. Baton Rouge had little damage.

"In that three weeks I generally worked 12 to 14 hours a day. During the three weeks, I only took one day off."

It was on that day that Ackerman

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