

# Hurricane evacuees historically find refuge with relatives

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO—Janet Riley is not from Louisiana, but her parents were born there, and so she spent part of almost every summer in New Orleans, visiting with her aunts, uncles and cousins and marveling at how friendly people were—smiling and wishing “good afternoon” to the little girl from Chicago standing on her grandmother’s porch.

Riley’s parents moved to Chicago following World War II to pursue the educational and economic opportunities a huge Northern city offered to black men and women. But roots and family always mattered—and never more than now.

The strong ties between Northern and Southern relations meant that when Riley’s 80-year-old uncle and his daughter needed a place to stay after evacuating Metairie, Louisiana, in Hurricane Katrina’s wake, she quickly offered her home in the Chicago suburb of Calumet City, Illinois.

“This is when you realize how important your family is,” said Riley’s cousin, Gail Williams, 46. “This is when you know who the people are that really care about you.”

Their story is being repeated in large urban areas like Detroit and St. Louis and throughout Chicago, where African-Americans have maintained strong cultural and family attachments to the South. Now these Northern migrants and their descendants are making room in their homes for Southern cousins, uncles and aunts, while black churches in the

North mount huge relief efforts.

Black Americans first began leaving the South following the Civil War and the end of slavery. But that trickle turned into a river during World War I—as many as 1 million Southern blacks moved to Northern cities between 1914 and 1919.

Another million headed north in the next decade, and the exodus continued in the following years, as men and women were drawn to the Northeast and Midwest by industrial jobs and the hope of better lives.

Still, the roads home were never abandoned.

Children are sent to the South for summers to get to know their extended family, annual reunions are anticipated for months, churches exchange choirs. Groups like the “Greenville, Mississippi Social Club” in Chicago allowed Delta migrants a place to interact and socialize.

“There is a constant flow of communication in ideas, people, money, church choirs and bits of culture from North to South, South to North,” said Christopher R. Reed, a history professor at Roosevelt University in Chicago.

Today’s phenomenon of storm evacuees finding homes with family up North “is the manifestation of a network of self-help at work—a network that was put into place probably in the earliest days after the end of slavery,” said Reed, author of the just published “Black Chicago’s First Century.”

Black churches have taken a large part in relief efforts.

In Detroit, for example, the Greater Grace Temple filled three 25-foot rental trucks with supplies bound for Alabama, and at Oak Grove AME, pastor Robert Brumfield—a New Orleans native—has a brother, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and nephew staying with him.

“The outpouring of concern and compassion does not only express itself in people who have a direct family tie to Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama,” he said. “But my congregation, there are those who have family members and former church associates.

... Lots of people from the South are here in Detroit.”

Across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Tommie Haynes has taken in nine family members—including his 75-year-old grandmother, his niece and her 6-week-old baby into his 5-bedroom house in Washington Park, Illinois.

Haynes moved North almost 20 years ago, frustrated that he couldn’t find a job in New Orleans, but he returned often for family reunions, Thanksgiving and the occasional Mardi Gras.

“They came here on a wing and a prayer,” Haynes said of his relatives, who thought they would be displaced for just a couple of days. “It is crowded here, but we’re making it.”

Back in the Chicago area, Lou Johnson found refuge in his older brother George’s three-bedroom house in the southern suburb of Crete, Illinois. He brought his fiancée, her teenage daughter and his fiancée’s sister; they evacuated New Orleans

before the hurricane hit but were staying in an Alabama hotel when his brother called to offer a place to stay.

“It’s a long way from what was formerly home, but home will not be home again,” said Lou Johnson, who was the director of education at the YMCA of Greater New Orleans. “It’s a blessing to be situated.”

His brother George left Louisiana in 1971, after his stint in the Navy, because he wanted his five children to be exposed to the museums, theater and other cultural opportunities Chicago had to offer.

Still, he and his wife sent their children, now adults, on what they called the “annual summer migration” to New Orleans to get to know their extended family.

The far-flung family also has a reunion every two or three years. George Johnson wonders if the next one, scheduled for Indianapolis, will be canceled because everyone from New Orleans is “starting over again.”

On the South Side of Chicago, the newly reunited cousins, Janet Riley and Gail Williams, attended a forum on hurricane relief efforts Thursday night at St. Stephens Evangelical Lutheran Church. Williams was wearing clothes donated by members of the church, where Riley worships.

As they prepared food for a reception afterward in the church basement, Williams joked about how poorly her cousin was carving the watermelon and took over the task.

“See Janet. I came to the rescue. I rescued you like you rescued me—they’ll never

know that you murdered the watermelon,” she giggled.

Riley, 45, who has lived alone for several years since her children left home, said the three adults are adjusting to their new living arrangement. Her uncle Robert Williams Jr. has taken over kitchen duties (he was at home baking a sweet potato pie) and she loves to laugh and chat with her cousin.

She has plenty of space in her three-bedroom home, but

if she hadn’t, she would have made room for the Southern relations her parents wanted her to know all those years ago.

“When we would go to my grandmother’s place, she lived in a small place, but if there were not enough bedrooms, there was always the sofa,” Riley said. “You improvise when you have to—that’s what family members are for. Family is the foundation.”



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## Natural health store continues with new owners

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lion industry in 2004. The Longs maintain that there’s enough business to go around.

“We’re empowering the customer with the knowledge and then they have the choice to buy from whomever they want,” said Steve Long. “There’s enough people to support all of us.”

The Longs have added a small educational center, with magazines and books about healthy eating and nutrition, as well as flyers and pamphlets for local services related to health and wellness. They’ve revamped the Web site and started an e-mail newsletter.

They’ve spent \$35,000 on the physical renovation of the building—a new sign on the outside of the building, repainting the black ceiling white and adding the store’s first computer and electronic inventory system. Until this year, Wall had managed the store’s 6,000-item inventory in her head.

“We’ve added a few more products, but we’re maintaining the tradition,” Steve Long said.

They also have added an

office in the back corner of their store where they can operate a small practice.

Nancy Long is a naturopathic doctor, a form of medicine combining traditional treatment and nontraditional medicine such as botanical medicine and nutrition. Before the couple bought Harmony Farms, she worked as a store manager for GNC. Steve Long is a therapist with Healing Touch, an international organization that trains therapists to use touch to influence people’s energy and improve their health.

“We wanted to have a place where our practices were together,” Steve Long said.

In the few months they have owned the store, the changes appear to be making a difference. Steve Long said sales so far have been up about 25 percent over last year. Harmony Farms held a grand reopening this weekend.

“It exceeded our expectations and went almost into the dream category,” Steve Long said. “It was so much better than we could have even hoped for.”

For Harmony Farms devotees, Wall says she’ll be stick-

ing around for now. She helps customers and still does some of the ordering four days a week, and is helping the Longs and her customers transition to the new ownership.

“It’s kind of like your baby,” Wall said. “You want to put it in good hands.”

Customers say they keep coming because they like the smaller store, expertise of the six-member staff and selection of products.

Apex resident Nancy Cochran has only been shopping at Harmony Farms for three weeks, but already they know her by name. Cochran is switching to an organic diet to alleviate acid reflux disease and arthritis.

“I had a lot of questions because I was new, and I was made to feel very comfortable to ask them,” she said. “Even in the new Harris Teeter (in Apex) there are only two doors in the frozen food section that are organic products. Here, there’s better selection and that makes it worth the trip.”

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Having Harmony Farms stay despite the change in ownership is a plus for Creedmoor Crossing, said Franklin Holmes, president of Hobby Properties, which owns the center.

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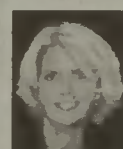
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