

# Pastors spread word about recovery assistance

By T.J. Aulds | Posted: Friday, April 30, 2010 12:00 am

TEXAS CITY — A group of about three dozen pastors plan to do more than spread the word of God for the next month. They also will carry a message to members of their church community who still might need help to recover from the effects of Hurricane Ike that there are millions of dollars in help out there.

The pastors mostly from predominantly black churches on the county's mainland met with Galveston County Judge Jim Yarbrough Galveston County Disaster Housing Assistance Program Director James Wilson and members of the Gulf Coast Interfaith in what officials said was the start of the next phase of hurricane housing assistance outreach efforts.

Despite the millions in hurricane housing repair and reconstruction assistance available in the county and in Galveston Wilson said thousands of residents who are eligible for assistance still have not sought help. A combination of residents not understanding or getting word that the help is available fear of muddling through a bureaucratic maze and the perception they might not be eligible for assistance has prevented most people from calling for help he said.

Wilson pointed to some door-to-door visits he made in La Marque on Wednesday. He said of 10 houses he visited four homeowners had not applied for help because they thought they would not be eligible for assistance.

He said now that they have applied for help it appears all four will have new houses built through the program he manages.

"We have hundreds of millions of dollars not going to be spent because we don't have enough applicants" Wilson said. "I need anybody who has a housing need to apply."

While most of the 1400 applicants the county has for its housing assistance program will gobble up almost all of the first round of federal funding a second round of money is on the way although it is not expected to be available until next year.

Wilson said county commissioners should next week approve a plan to lift a cap on the income requirements making more people eligible for the assistance.

Joe Higgs one of the leaders of Gulf Coast Interfaith said figures from the county and the Federal Emergency Management Agency show that in some communities less than 19 percent of residents who likely would be eligible for assistance have applied for help either through the county's housing program the Ike housing assistance program in Galveston or through case management services such as those offered through Rise a social service agency established to help storm victims.

He warned the pastors who agreed to help lead members of their flock to the assistance offered that the process can be daunting but is worth the effort.

”It happens for those who persist” Higgs said. ”This is not easy and it’s not for everyone whose home is in disrepair just for those that the hurricane damaged.”

The Rev. James Brown the pastor of Barbour’s Chapel Baptist Church in West Texas City said a quick glance at the neighborhoods near his church tell him there are ”hundreds” still in need of assistance.

”You drive around and see all the blue (tarped) roofs and you get the message” Brown said. ”Hundreds of people don’t know how to go and get help.”

He said Thursday’s breakfast meeting inspired him to be proactive. He plans to drive around the community and write down addresses of those homes he thinks deserve a visit.

Brown said he then plans to make a call from the pulpit for the next several weeks for members of the church to walk the neighborhoods and hand out fliers and door hangers advertising where and how to get help.

”This is still doing God’s work” Brown said. ”This is our call to action.”

+++

At A Glance

Numbers to call for help

Galveston County Ike Housing Assistance

877-221-8215

City of Galveston Ike Housing Assistance

409-797-3773

Social services assistance

409-643-8260 or 281-578-8594