

The Jesse Tree is ready to help needy

By Ted Hanley | Posted: Saturday, November 22, 2008 11:00 pm

The Jesse Tree takes its name from Scripture: “A shoot will come up from the stem of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit.”

It was founded here in Galveston 14 years ago with the idea of improving stewardship of resources reducing duplication of effort and integrating health care social services and ministerial assistance.

Its main offices on Market Street housed the Bilingual Call Center Resource Coordination and administrated the 25 programs that have sprung up to fill gaps and offer services to Galveston and Brazoria county residents.

Those range from the Friday Food Fairs (the brainchild of The Houston Food Bank) which has sent more than \$9 million of produce to Galveston County through food fairs in the past eight years to the Health Equipment Loan Program that collects refurbishes and loans wheelchairs hospital beds and medical supplies to the uninsured.

Before the recent hurricane The Jesse Tree staff had learned that each year Galvestonians failed to enroll for multimillions of dollars of medical care and social services. Each year more than \$40 million of food stamps were never spent in our stores 70 percent of Galveston County’s eligible children never enrolled in Head Start 40 percent of women eligible for WIC (Women Infant Children) never got enrolled and almost 80 percent of seniors eligible for Qualified Medicare Beneficiary never knew it existed.

Earned Income Tax Credits in excess of \$200 million were not claimed. Why? Simple: transportation translation complicated applications and steep requirements (current IDs birth certificates immunization records etc.). We now need those resources and revenues more than ever.

On Sept. 13 Hurricane Ike slammed ashore. The Jesse Tree’s Bolivar Branch in Crystal Beach remains standing but everything in the building was lost.

The two buildings on Market Street were submerged under several feet of water. Everything was destroyed.

Our friends neighbors and collaborators — St. Vincent’s House The Salvation Army Catholic Charities The AIDS Coalition (ACCT) The Children’s Center Big Brothers Big Sisters the ADA

Women's Center Gleanings from the Harvest The Gulf Coast Center Community Action Council Galveston County Social Services and others — were devastated too.

Three cheers for Michael Jackson Maj. Elda Flores Elizabeth Kinard Georgia Nelson Terry Keel Cindy Shultz Ellie Hanley Mark Davis Mike Winburn Norma Mitchell Joe Metyko and all those who are valiantly striving to rebuild their pantries offices and warehouses to restore life-giving services to our community.

Immediately after the storm Kenna Bush of the Galveston United Way called a meeting to bring providers together. From a small gathering a larger and larger group formed to mobilize and locate temporary quarters from which to operate.

Liz White of Mainland United Way Jeanette Taylor of NAMI Bill Buffam The Family Service Center Carol Ann Chairez Community Youth Development Mona Purgason Galveston Housing Authority Irma Ortiz American Red Cross and representatives of FEMA the Kempner Fund Moody Methodist Permanent Endowment Fund Mary Moody Northen Endowment and the city of Galveston also joined.

The first couple of attempts to create a “one-stop-shop” for those seeking disaster recovery services were like the Wright Brother's first few flights — up and down. But new heroes stepped to the forefront.

Joe Compian invited The Jesse Tree to move the “one-stop-shop” to the school building at Holy Rosary Church located at 31st Street and Avenue N. The generosity of that congregation allows us room for medical screening and assessment case management and prescription assistance.

The Houston Food Bank quickly approved the site for The Jesse Tree's Pantry and promptly filled it to the ceiling with nutritious foods and supplies.

The Children's Center found a room to offer classes to its residents. The Chamber of Commerce set up temporary quarters and Erin Toberman found space to set up Help4Galveston to assist with locating and coordinating assistance and resources. A mini-mall of compassion unfurled.

Although we lost our offices and furnishings The Jesse Tree was designed to be a “virtual” program. All case management records were electronically stored and secure. Through the generosity of two Houston businessmen we purchased wireless laptops and portable printerscanners for every resource coordinator and went wireless and paperless immediately after the storm.

Files are accessed by the Internet. IDs and consent forms are scanned. Claudia Gutierrez and Monica Garcia both resource coordinators began assisting their neighbors with FEMA applications the day after the storm and those families have already been funded.

The Resource and Crisis Center The Gulf Coast Center's Substance Abuse Services and ADA Women's Center placed staff members at Holy Rosary. Curtiss Brown and Joe Metyko of Galveston County Social Services allowed the Social Work Department to join The Jesse Tree staff and the teamwork has been extraordinary.

Medical screening and chronic conditions management have been provided by UTMB's Care Management and Community Outreach.

Richie Adoue of RSVP and Priscilla Kirby of the SER Program have placed volunteers at the Holy Rosary Center and across the community. Parishioners of Holy Rosary Sacred Heart and St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica have quietly consistently kept the place going and kept it cleaned and stocked. What an effort.

It is two months since the storm changed all of our lives. In its wake we continue to be distressed and anxious. The loss of jobs at UTMB people still scrambling to find living quarters replace furniture and appliances frustration awaiting insurance payments or approval from FEMA takes a toll on us all. Today started out gloomy and gray but by noon the sun was shining and it was a beautiful day.

It was business as usual at The Holy Rosary Mini-Mall of Compassion. People were waiting to see case managers trucks were delivering food to the pantry Margaret was folding clothes.

All seemed right with the world. I took out the cell phone and placed an order for Mario's pizzas to be delivered for the staff. When lunch arrived we gathered ate pizza and drank soft drinks.

I thanked them for being there and for generously giving of themselves to help so many people.

Each of us is there because something is giving us courage strength and motivation to recover from the storm. What are you doing to find the strength and courage to continue?

Ted Hanley is the executive director of The Jesse Tree. He can be reached at jessetree.net.

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How To Cope

What are you doing to find the strength and courage to continue? The staff and friends of The Jesse Tree offered these thoughts:

"Take a few quiet moments a couple of times each day to pray read a poem meditate and relax. Breathe deeply." — Ted Hanley

"Connect with old friends. Get reacquainted Laugh." — Claudia Gutierrez

"Get up and watch the sunrise. It will remind you of the beauty of the day and dispel the gloom."
— David Mitchell

“Drive across the causeway and notice how clean it is. You can see hope and a future and the positive changes. Instead of coming home to a pile of debris now we come home to a bright future.” — Evon Semien

“Help somebody I enjoy helping others and people have been very grateful for the assistance.” — Tashonda Edwards

“Spend time with family and friends. Refresh your batteries and don’t talk about work.” — Joe Compian

“Stick to a routine. It makes life more normal and that got us through the toughest days. If you don’t have a routine set one.” — Billie Rae Gillas

“Even if you’re an adult let your Mom take care of you. I did. Visit with family and rejuvenate.” — Kelley Kelly

“Spend time with your children. Tell them all the good memories that you have of Galveston.” — Rudy Orasco

“Drive across the new causeway and appreciate the new construction” — Jim Brown

“Stay busy. There’s always something you can be doing to improve the situation. Be positive.” — James Jackson

“When we go through a storm sometimes it’s difficult to stay focused on our faith but faith will see us through. If you have lost everything you still have faith. There is a reason we’re still here and our faith will guide us and inspire us to press on. If we look back we lose focus. Look forward. Have faith. We’re through the storm and the Lord is with us.” — Dorothy Goodman

“Listen to some good music. Find inspiration in song.” — Jodie Tefer

“Watch a good inspirational movie: “What the Bleep? Down the Rabbit Hole” “The Secret” or something funny.” — Gloria Rubio

“Inhale a bag of delicious baked snap-pea crisps (or your favorite healthy snack) and if that doesn’t do the trick take a walk go for a run or spend some time in meditation.” — Caryl Sherman-Gonzalez

“Pull together with friends and neighbors to get through.” — Margaret Blanks

“Look to positive role models. The good people of Gulfport Miss. and New Orleans La. have much to share with us by way of advice encouragement and inspiration. In fact many groups from those areas are sending their love and encouragement through donations and practical suggestions. Listen.” — Sheila Savage

“Help one another. I’m volunteering at The Jesse Tree pantry and helping others.” — Juan Esquivel

“Enjoy fellowship with like-minded people. Dive into the recovery effort and you will transcend your own troubles. Join in the common goal of rebuilding.” — Joseph Herrmann

“Take a walk on the seawall and enjoy the beauty of the Gulf. Look forward to Hooters reopening.” — Pat Golden

“Wake up early get up put one foot in front of the other and keep moving ahead” — Lila Wills

“Do something nice for a child. So many families have lost everything. At one of our Food Fairs I watched a mom as she selected items for her family. Her son wanted a can of spaghetti and meatballs but she chose the beans and franks instead. She was too distracted to hear his pleas so as they passed by I handed him the spaghetti and meatballs and saw the look of joy on his face. A small item but a very big thing for him. Help a child.” — Monica Garcia

“Make a point of getting to know all of your neighbors I had the only working washer and dryer and we had a ball getting to know one another” — Donna Robichaux

“Focus on something that you have left after the storm. Appreciate it more than ever. Let go of the things that were lost and focus on what’s left.” — Sandra Martinez-Garvock

“Work closely together with others. When Galveston County Social Services joined forces with The Jesse Tree it allowed us to work shoulder to shoulder as a team. Together the help we have given others has been amazing. Listen to other people’s storm stories and offer them encouragement. Make new friends.” — Vergie Quinonez

“I can’t replace a house or a car but I have been able to help people in a small way — pay a bill or provide them with groceries It’s a start and it helps all of us rebuild. Do some small thing to help someone each day.” — Florence Robinson