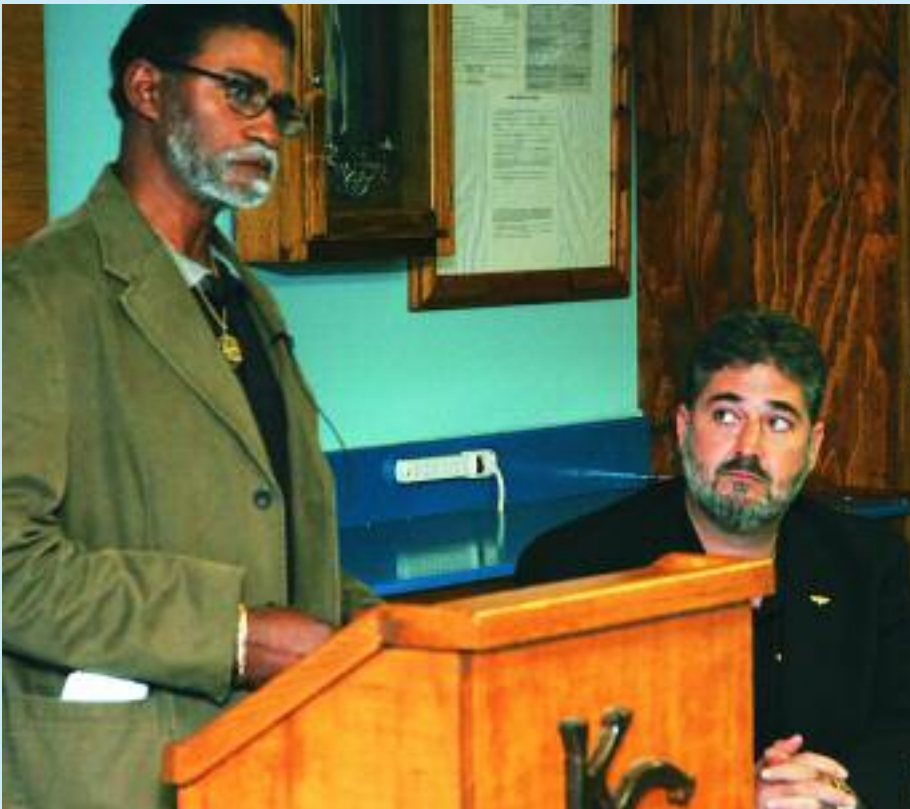


Lending a Hand to Gulf Coast Survivors



Southern Territory GVP Bob Martinez listens as Local 2249 member Clarence Harris describes the losses he suffered, including two family members, when Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

In addition to the parade in Baton Rouge, the week-long observance in Louisiana included workshops, community service activities and a special event to honor IAM members along the Gulf Coast who survived the hurricanes and are rebuilding their homes and communities.

Celebrating Survival

Vivid photographs of breached levees, rooftop rescues and widespread devastation in New Orleans' working class neighborhoods riveted the world's attention in the days after Katrina roared ashore on August 29, 2005.

But it was small towns along Mississippi's Gulf Coast that took the full force of the historic storm and are held together today by the sheer will of the residents who remain.

At a meeting hall in Picayune, MS, surrounded by tall pines snapped in half and roads only recently cleared of debris, IAM members honored

Several thousand union members and civil rights activists were joined by senior citizens, teenagers and even toddlers in the historic Beauregard section of Baton Rouge, LA for this year's parade to celebrate the birthday and the vision of slain civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The AFL-CIO event in Baton Rouge was one of hundreds of observances across the country that focused on the state of human rights, union rights and civil rights

under the administration of President George W. Bush and the Republican-led Congress.

"It's a worst case scenario to have all three branches of government controlled by one political party," observed IAM Executive Assistant Diane Babineaux, who led a contingent of IAM members to Louisiana for this year's observance. "It's fitting that we honor Dr. King by marching in the streets. It's where we won our rights and it may be where we have to win them back again."

the hundreds of Machinists along Gulf Coast who lost homes, belongings and family members to the deluge.

“We celebrate victories and we suffer losses like a family in this union,” said Southern Territory General Vice President Bob Martinez to nearly 100 members from nearby IAM Local Lodges. “But nothing compares to the losses you endured in this storm and its aftermath.”

Members at the meeting wept openly as they shared stories of rising water and narrow escapes as they struggled to survive. Tears turned to laughter as they found humor even in their darkest hours.

“I felt bad as I watched a stream of furniture and belongings float by my house,” said Local 1133 member Bunky Boswell. “I felt even worse when I realized it was my own furniture and belongings.”

Helping Hand

More than 1,150 Machinists from Florida to Texas received assistance from the union’s Community Services Department after the storms hit. Dozens of IAM



Uprooted and devastated, families leave spray-painted messages for loved ones and cleanup crews.

families lost everything, according to Special Representative Tommy Mayfield, who coordinated the distribution of food, tools and nearly \$300,000 in donations from IAM members.

Local 1133 member Nancy Vierling, whose house was totally destroyed, was grateful for the fund which helped her to buy a new stove. Local 2249 member and Waveland, MS resident Clarence Harris, who lost two family members to the waters, praised the union and thanked everyone who made donations.

“You will never know how

much your help meant to us in our time of need,” said Harris.

Other members were baffled by upbeat comments from President Bush, who toured the Mississippi coast on his way to a fundraising event the day before the IAM gathering in Picayune.

“Anyone can see this part of Mississippi was nearly washed away,” said one member. “It’s a little early to be hanging any ‘Mission Accomplished’ banners around here.”

Even now, more than six months after the winds died away, large stretches of the Gulf Coast remain virtually uninhabitable. Many residents live in cars, tents and trailers, surrounded by the rubble of family homes.

Entire neighborhoods had houses ripped from foundations and belongings swept away. Families suffer from slow cleanup efforts. This photo was taken nearly six months after Katrina hit in August, 2005.

