

*Honoring the Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

# Union Members Answer Call to Community Service



*IAM members were part of the hundreds of union members who performed numerous community service projects in New Orleans neighborhoods to commemorate the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy.*

**F**orty-one years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was slain in Memphis and just days before Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th president of the United States, hundreds of union members gathered in New Orleans, LA, to celebrate a labor-civil rights movement that

is more vibrant than ever.

As it has for years, community service marked the week-long 2009 AFL-CIO MLK Holiday Observance. Union members fanned out across the city to help rebuild areas still reeling from Hurricane Katrina and the woeful federal response that followed.

A visitor to New Orleans' Central Business District, which includes the fabled French Quarter, might assume that the city has largely recovered from the storms of 2005. Shops are thriving, restaurants are full and zydeco music fills the air. But unlike much of New Orleans, the Central

Business District and the French Quarter are above sea level and were spared the flooding that devastated more than 80 percent of the city.

### Still Rebuilding

A short drive from the Central Business District reveals ghostly neighborhoods that still bear vivid scars of wind and water. In the hardest hit areas, entire blocks remain vacant, with only bare foundations marking where homes once stood.

To help rebuild, hundreds of union members took part in more than 20 separate projects across New Orleans that ranged from restoring parks to rebuilding individual union members' homes.

Union painters, electricians, and drywall artisans worked side-by-side with homeowners who are determined to remain in their city, despite surroundings that resemble a war zone and an infrastructure that is often compared to a third-world nation.

In addition to individual homes and local parks, the union volunteers worked with civil rights activists to help restore elec-

*Grand Lodge Representative Steve Cooper, right, was one of many union members who helped restore a baseball field in a New Orleans neighborhood.*

***"It's important to call attention to the condition of these neighborhoods more than three years after the hurricane hit."***

*Diane Babineaux  
Executive Assistant to the  
International President*

trical service to a local church and repair an African-American museum.

### Isn't Over

IAM members taking part in the week's activities wielded shovels, rakes and wheelbarrows to help restore a pair of local ball fields,

where floodwaters up to eight feet high remained for days, leaving behind a sludge-covered wasteland.

"It's important to call attention to the condition of these neighborhoods more than three years after the hurricane hit," said IAM Executive Assistant Diane Babineaux, who led the Machinists' contingent to New Orleans. "The nation's media may have packed up and moved on, but it's up to us to tell the world that this story isn't over."

In addition to the New Orleans activities, more than 20,000 AFL-CIO union members in 41 cities answered a call by Barack Obama to honor Dr. King's legacy with community service activities.





*The new Obama administration will bring welcomed changes to federal agencies that govern all aspects of collective bargaining in the railroad sector, making it possible to win a better future for workers and their families.*

## Looking Ahead for Progress

This is an exciting time for TCU. The successes of 2008 will build a strong foundation for many more in 2009. Last year's successful FMLA arbitration and new Amtrak contracts demonstrate TCU's effectiveness and determination.

The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States was a pivotal step to bring about the changes in government that working Americans sorely need. TCU looks forward to a close relationship with the new administration, and we are optimistic that the voices of TCU members will be heard, and acted upon, for

years to come.

One of the most important reasons to support Barack Obama was our need for union-friendly appointments to the numerous federal agencies that so strongly influence rail workers' lives. For years, our interests have been battered by anti-labor ideologues appointed by President Bush.

President Obama has already passed this test. TCU is delighted with his nomination of Congresswoman Hilda Solis as Secretary of Labor. Solis has been a champion of workers' rights throughout her career, and is a close friend of TCU. She is a strong supporter of the

Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). During her confirmation hearing, she pointedly testified that for too long the Department of Labor has worked to protect management interests instead of labor.

TCU looks forward to President Obama's appointments to the National Mediation Board, National Labor Relations Board, Department of Transportation, Federal Railroad Administration, and the many other agencies that hold real power over our working conditions. TCU is confident that all of his agency appointments will understand the needs of working families.