



Jerry W. Friedman

As a lover of Jazz, New Orleans has always had a special allure for me. As I watched the tragic events of Katrina unfold, the classic blues lyrics, “Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?” kept reverberating in my head. I kept thinking of my friend Leonard, a well-known French Quarter chef whom I was desperate to locate. I agonized at the level of human suffering occurring openly in this great city and the slow response to meet even the most basic needs. The juxtaposition of the victims of this storm, most of whom had lost everything, huddled in front of the Super Dome was haunting to me. It became evident that APhSA had to respond on behalf of our members in need, even though we are a private association without official standing in the relief community.

APHSA adopted a multi-pronged approach with complete focus on providing relief. We established contact early with human service leaders in the affected states to offer our support and assess need. Meanwhile, staff was mobilized to gather and deploy resources, disseminate information, and intervene when required. The level of energy, team spirit, sense of urgency, and genuine concern was exemplary. All state and local members were surveyed to see what resources could be offered. Meanwhile, we set up a comprehensive tracking mechanism to monitor regulatory and legislative activity related to the relief effort. This work was posted on our web site, which served as a great resource for multiple audiences. Of critical importance was the technical work behind the scenes, including “tweaking” of policy to allow for the maximization of resources, flexibility, and simplicity.

APHSA's response was both strategic and tactical. In addition to the superb policy analysis under the direction of Elaine Ryan, we were directly involved in the delivery of relief services. When Texas opened its arms to Katrina evacuees, my

co-worker Kathryn Dyjak volunteered her services in Houston and helped set up shelters and benefit centers. Gary Cyphers, deputy executive director of member services, raced the clock to coordinate the deployment of 163 volunteer eligibility workers from 10 states. These unsung heroes worked side by side with the dedicated staff from the affected states, many of whom were also victims of the storm. They processed thousands

- In less than two weeks, APhSA's conference staff transferred a major event originally scheduled for New Orleans to a site 1,500 miles away; and
- Cari DeSantis, Delaware CEO and chair of the APhSA's National Council, who had prior international relief experience, volunteered to accompany a team from APhSA to the storm area, providing valuable technical assistance to state officials.

Reflections on Katrina

of emergency food stamp applications while sleeping in cots in church basements and, in some cases, in tents.

While many federal agencies received harsh criticism for their untimely and inadequate relief efforts, the response of the Food and Nutrition Service was exemplary. Within hours, FNS, under the leadership of Undersecretary Eric Bost, helped states implement an emergency food stamp program of unprecedented proportions. I believe that the coordination and cooperation among APhSA, USDA, and the state and local human service programs during this crisis was a model of effective partnering.

I am very proud of my co-workers at APhSA. Without fanfare, they worked tirelessly and demonstrated great initiative and creativity. This was a labor of love transparent to most, but significant to so many. While space does not permit me the opportunity to acknowledge all of the outstanding deeds, the following are a couple of examples:

- Liz Oppenheim, interstate director, filling a major void, developed a tracking tool to locate and account for children placed out of state;
- Sonali Patel, a policy associate, on her own initiative and time, created a matrix of relief waivers from prior disasters that one CEO from an affected state described as the best tool that they received during the crisis;

While Katrina may have exposed the flaws in our national safety net, we cannot lose sight of the fact that it has also brought out the best in many human service professionals. As an association, APhSA has learned a number of lessons, including the need for effective communications, disaster planning, and tools to assist our members during their most challenging times. We will work hard on developing products.

After numerous attempts, my wife, Jeanette, and I were finally able to reach our friend Leonard. After an incredible odyssey, he made it safely to St. Charles, only to be displaced again by Hurricane Rita. Facing unbelievable adversity, he is now on his way back home to rebuild his residence and his business so we won't have “to miss New Orleans.” One can never underestimate the power, strength, and resolve of the human spirit. I can't wait to hook up with Leonard again and listen to some sweet jazz in the Big Easy.