

KATRINA: THE STORM WE'VE ALWAYS FEARED

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HURRICANE EDITION

CATASTROPHIC

STORM SURGE SWAMPS 9TH WARD, ST. BERNARD

LAKEVIEW LEVEE BREACH THREATENS TO INUNDATE CITY



By Bruce Nolan
Staff writer

Hurricane Katrina struck metropolitan New Orleans on Monday with a staggering blow, far surpassing Hurricane Betsy, the landmark disaster of an earlier generation. The storm flooded huge swaths of the city, as well as Slidell on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain, in a process that appeared to be spreading even as night fell.

A powerful storm surge pushed huge waves ahead of the hurricane, flooding much of St. Bernard Parish and New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward, just as Betsy 40 years ago. But this time the flooding was more extensive, spreading upriver as well to cover parts of the Bywater, Marigny and Tremé neighborhoods.

As with Betsy, people scrambled into their attics or atop their roofs, pleading for help from the few passers-by.

The powerful Category 4 storm crossed the coast near the mouth of the Pearl River shortly after daybreak with winds of 135 mph. Naval Air Station-Joint Reserve Base in Belle Chasse reported an early morning gust of 105 mph.

With the power out throughout the area and fierce winds raging throughout the day, officials barely began Monday to assess the full damage of the monstrous storm, which was expected to leave thousands homeless and many more coping with damage from the wind and water.

Meantime, 5 miles to the west, engineers worked to close a breach along the New Orleans side of the 17th Street Canal.

Huge drainage pumps ordinarily can drive millions of gallons of rainwater uphill through

STAFF PHOTO BY ALEX BRANDON

NINTH WARD: An elderly resident is rescued from chest-high floodwaters by two New Orleans police officers.

See **KATRINA**, A-4

Flooding wipes out two communities

By Brian Thevenot and Manuel Torres
Staff writers

As Jerry Rayes piloted his boat down St. Claude Avenue, just past the Industrial Canal, the eerie screams that could barely be heard from the roadway grew louder as, one by one, faces of desperate families appeared on rooftops, on balconies and in windows, some of them waving white flags.

The scene wouldn't change for the next three hours, as Rayes and his son and nephew boated down St. Claude Avenue and deep into St. Bernard Parish, where water smothered two-story houses, people and animals. The men had to duck to miss streetlights that towered over Judge Perez Drive, the parish's main thoroughfare.

The people Rayes rescued all told the same story, already written on their stunned and shivering

See **FLOOD**, A-6

INSIDE



PHOTO BY A.J. SISCO

DOWNTOWN: The damage to the Hyatt Regency on Poydras Street shows that vertical evacuation is no solution to the dangers of a Category 4 hurricane. See story, A-15

After the mighty storm came the rising water

By Doug MacCash and James O'Byrne
Staff writers

A large section of the vital 17th Street Canal levee, where it connects to the brand new 'hurricane proof' Old Hammond Highway bridge, gave way late Monday morning in Bucktown after Katrina's fiercest winds were well north. The breach sent a churning sea of water from Lake Pontchartrain coursing across Lakeview and into Mid-City, Carrollton, Gentilly, City Park and neighborhoods farther south and east.

As night fell on a devastated region, the water was still rising in the city, and nobody was willing to predict when it would stop. After the destruction already apparent in the wake of Katrina, the American Red Cross was mobilizing for what regional officials were calling the largest recovery operation in the or-

ganization's history.

Police officers, firefighters and private citizens, hampered by a lack of even rudimentary communication capabilities, continued a desperate and impromptu boat-borne rescue operation across Lakeview well after dark. Coast Guard helicopters with searchlights criss-crossed the skies.

Officers working on the scene said virtually every home and business between the 17th Street Canal and the Marconi Canal, and between Robert E. Lee Boulevard and City Park Avenue, had water in it. Nobody had confirmed any fatalities as a result of the levee breach, but they conceded that hundreds of homes had not been checked.

As the sun set over a still-rolling Lake Pontchartrain, the smoldering ruins of the Southern Yacht Club were still burning, and smoke streamed out over

See **BREACH**, A-2

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