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## Builders use skills to aid hurricane victims

By: Peter Suanlarm, Staff Writer

**A year after Hurricane Katrina, hundreds of thousands of people in Louisiana and Mississippi are still displaced from their homes and looking for any kind of hope.**

Owner Bob Tilghman and Production Manager Mike Fallon of Hatboro-based Tilghman Builders Inc. attempted to provide some of that hope when they assembled a team, traveled down to Mississippi and helped rebuild homes devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

"We just wanted to help out," Fallon said. "Living conditions are unbelievable down there and people are losing hope. Now that most of the debris has been cleaned up, homeowners are facing the facts that they don't have the construction know-how to rebuild their houses or the money to buy labor and materials. You have to meet these unfortunate people to realize what they are going through."

The full-service home-remodeling firm closed down for a week from Aug. 13 to 20. Family and 10 employees went to Mississippi to provide aid.



*Mike Fallon (left) and Bob Tilghman (right), both of Tilghman Builders in Hatboro, point to the location in Mississippi where they spent a week helping Hurricane Katrina victims rebuild their homes.*

The company, located on 19 Byberry Road in Hatboro, handles architectural and design services through project planning, construction and final inspection. It helped rebuild three houses in Bay Saint Louis and Waveland on the Mississippi coast.

"What they were looking for were skilled craftsmen," Fallon said.

The two cities were adopted by the Bucks-Mont Katrina Relief Project, an association of businesses, community groups and religious organizations dedicated to restoring the lives of people ravaged by the storm.

"The people said that Hancock County was the poorest county in Mississippi," Tilghman said. "The houses we worked on were chosen on a need basis." The company took two of its own vehicles and a 15-passenger van on the 22-hour trip to Mississippi. Once there, the group worked from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Friday.

"They were blown away about the amount of work we did," Tilghman said. "The most frustrating part was getting supplies."

The Bucks-Mont Katrina Relief Project's sub-committee for residential projects enlisted the support of the Bucks-Mont Chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry to help the Mississippi residents get back into their homes.

"When most of us think about the victims of Hurricane Katrina, we think about New Orleans," Fallon said. "These communities in Mississippi were hit just as hard and need our help just as much. People are still living in trailers provided by FEMA [the Federal Emergency Management Agency]."

Fallon and two members of NARI's volunteer committee visited the area in June.

The group led by Tilghman Builders is the first from Bucks-Mont NARI to respond to the need for home rebuilding. The plan calls for a group from NARI to visit Mississippi each month to help families in Bay Saint Louis and Waveland return to their homes. This effort is estimated to take from two to five years to complete.

The Tilghman team and following NARI construction crews are targeting to make six homes available for occupancy with each monthly visit. The new teams will know in advance the scope of the projects, the materials required and the local contacts who can help with the process.

The Bucks-Mont Katrina Relief Project is funding the transportation for these projects from monetary and in-kind donations. The organization needs the continued support of individuals and businesses to keep these programs running.

Donations to the Bucks-Mont Katrina Relief Project are tax deductible and are being accepted by The Salvation Army.

To learn more about how you can help the families in Mississippi rebuild their homes and their lives, visit the Web site at [www.bucksmontkatrinaproject.org](http://www.bucksmontkatrinaproject.org) or call Collette McBratney at 215-825-4615, or e-mail at [cmcbratney@use.salvationarmy.org](mailto:cmcbratney@use.salvationarmy.org).

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