

Industry Gives a Lift to **Hurricane** Victims

by David M. Clothier

While New Orleans has received most of the media attention as it recovers from the effects of Hurricane Katrina, the Mississippi Gulf Coast actually felt the brunt of the powerful storm. The high winds and storm surge laid waste to many homes and businesses along the shore, including those in Pascagoula, Mississippi, where the storm surge was estimated at 18 feet high.

One such business that is also home to many in Pascagoula is the Gardens at Bay Towers, a four-story senior-living residence about a quarter mile from the waterfront. Even though the building is more than four blocks from the water, the storm surge flooded the ground floor. Two months after the storm, the high-water mark was still visible about five feet above the floor.





The building had been purchased by the current owners, Ann Arnold and Monica Belieu, only a few months earlier in March. The building had 76 apartments and 22 residents in extended care. According to Eldredge "Butch" Arnold, Ann Arnold's husband, "11-14 people stayed through the storm, because they had nowhere else to go." While everyone was safe in the upstairs rooms, the storm surge severely damaged the only elevator serving the building. Also lost were a 110-ton air conditioner and a 1.5-million-BTU boiler. Both the office and kitchen were flooded.

At left:

The Schindler crew and their hosts: (l-r) Jerry Matheny, Kevin Haden, Jennifer Graham, Butch Arnold, Tom Myers, Ann Arnold, Daniel Kelly, Mark O'Hara, Jon Kline, Monica Belieu, Robert Johnson, Danny Tompkins and Scott Chaltain

Above:

Jennifer Graham, left, sought help for her friend's home from the elevator industry. When first contacted, Jerry Matheny, right, told her, "There's no such thing as a free elevator." However, with his help, the equipment and manpower needed for the project were both donated.

At right: The Gardens at Bay Towers

Without the elevator, some residents who stayed could not leave their floors because of their limited mobility. Others did not return because of the elevator situation. Of the 78 residential units, only 30 were occupied after the hurricane. While the Federal Emergency Management Agency would provide them a low-interest loan, the owners were faced with enormous repair expenses and knew that if they did not get help soon, they would be faced with the possibility of having to close the facility. Enter Jennifer Graham, a student at Mississippi State University (MSU) who grew up in Pascagoula.

"I know several of the families and long-time residents at the Gardens at Bay Towers, and during a weekend visit home, I visited one of those residents, [Virgie] Farmer. There I discovered the horrible conditions and lacking facilities caused by Hurricane Katrina," she explained. "When I came back to MSU, I immediately began 'working the phones' to try to get help. After speaking with several elevator companies, I stumbled upon Cindy Samek [of Lift Solutions]. She directed me to Jerry Matheny [at Schindler's office in Pensacola, Florida]." Graham then put Matheny and Arnold together.

After his visit to the site, Matheny wrote Graham, "The equipment is in pretty bad shape and will require almost total replacement, [but] I have good news. Most of the vendors that manufacture elevator equipment that I use month after month have verbally agreed to participate in this worthwhile effort." Even without the storm damage, the equipment was due for a modernization. The original equipment had been installed in 1964.

Samek, Jed Shapiro and others at Lift Solutions began soliciting additional help from the elevator industry. Matheny set a goal to have a new elevator in place and running by Thanksgiving. Schindler personnel would repair, modernize and restore the elevator service, while others in the industry supplied the needed parts.

The suppliers included:

- ◆ Fixtures: Jeff Kneuer; Monitor Controls; Hauppauge, New York
- ◆ Controls: Fernando Ortiz; Elevator Controls Corp.; Sacramento, California

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- ◆ Starter: Siemens c/o Joe Roberts; Access Elevator Supply; Emeryville, California
- ◆ Battery lowering: John Reinartz; Reynolds & Reynolds; Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
- ◆ Landing system: Mike Miller; Interface Products; Bay Shore, New York
- ◆ Traveler, duct and wiring: Sterrett Lloyd; Draka Elevator Products, Inc.; Rocky Mount, North Carolina
- ◆ Pump unit: Randy Greenberg; Unitec Parts Co.; Bloomfield, Connecticut

The equipment was delivered on November 16. The Schindler crew loaded the equipment and left Pensacola the next day at 5 a.m. for the two-hour drive to Pascagoula. They stayed on the project until 7 p.m. the following Sunday. Monday was the day of adjustment and pickup.

While one never gets used to the severe damage caused by a hurricane, the Schindler personnel had already experienced it themselves. Many had seen their homes severely damaged when Hurricane Ivan devastated the Pensacola area in 2004. In some cases, the repairs to their homes were still underway.

The team acknowledged that the project was worth all the time and effort. In addition to seeing the friendly faces of the residents, 90-year-old Farmer made banana pudding for the Schindler crew to enjoy during their breaks.

The Schindler crew also tried to schedule visits for Thursday and include lunch at Monica's, a local restaurant owned by Belieu. "Lunch is a must at Monica's," Matheny explained. "Thursday is fried pork chop day."

Matheny summed up his feelings and those of his crew in an e-mail to Shapiro after the project was completed:

I have to say the Bay Towers project has and will continue to mean so many things to so many people. I would like to thank you for your efforts and everyone at Lift Solutions and all the generous donations by each vendor. You guys rock. I have so many memories of this project, I find it hard to put into words in a single e-mail.

In addition to the help from the elevator industry, Graham's aunt, Carolyn Ezell of Antelope, California, brought other volunteers from her North Valley Church and other church groups from California, Colorado and Nevada to help clean, make repairs and paint the storm-damaged residential facility.

Matheny made good on his promise to have the elevator back in service before Thanksgiving. Allene Redd, one of the ladies who had ridden out the storm in the building, had been stranded on her floor for two and a half months because she could not get up and down the stairs. She had the honor of taking the first ride after the elevator was operational. "We appreciate what everybody has done," she told ELEVATOR WORLD. "We couldn't

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At left (l-r):

Schindler employees (l-r) Danny Thompson and Kevin Haden inspect the recently installed new equipment.

Storm damage in the machine room

Below (l-r):

Schindler team surveying the damage

Allene Redd had the honor of being the first resident to ride the new elevator. A plaque will be installed in the car recognizing the assistance of Schindler and others in the elevator industry that made the new elevator possible.

have made it without all these volunteers."

In early December, the people of the Gardens at Bay Towers held a celebration of their good fortune and to honor the volunteers who had helped bring some normalcy to their lives. The Schindler crew was there, like they had been (off and on) for the last month.

"It's like giving people feet," Arnold said of the new elevator. "They couldn't get up and down the stairs. A lot of them have walkers and canes, and some are in wheelchairs."

"It was an opportunity to get people together," added Belieu. "We didn't wait for the government. It's just amazing what they accomplished." 

