



The Lord & Taylor Rose Parterre at New Orleans City Park before (above) and after (below) Hurricane Katrina.

Restoring Roses to Southern Gardens

Bringing Back Beauty One Rosebush at a Time

The way of life for hundreds of thousands of American citizens was dramatically changed when nature's fury ravaged the U.S. Southern Gulf Coast in the summer of 2005. The ferocity of the storms left an aftermath of unprecedented carnage and devastation in their wake. Much of the coastal beauty of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama was truly "Gone with the Wind."

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photos courtesy Lee Stevens





Cathy MacNamara (l) and Paul Soniat (r) of City Park Botanic Gardens, New Orleans, receive 17 new roses for the park from Sharon Lidenheimer (c) of Friends of New Orleans.

Behind the statistics of 1,800 dead, 2,000 unaccounted for, and 200,000 homes damaged or destroyed are the faces of real people struggling to regain their lives. These very real individuals are encountering increased levels of stress and depression as the full impact of the storm's legacy continues to unfold in front of their eyes. They often feel overwhelmed by the circumstances and now, one year later, they often feel forgotten.

“People from our area are trying to return to ‘normal’ — houses are being re-roofed, fences replaced, FEMA trailers are everywhere, and we are fixing whatever insurance will cover.”

How would you like to hear some good news from the South?

The Riverside Rose Society, the third oldest society in Southern California, has launched its first history-making national project called, *Restoring Roses to Southern Gardens: Bringing Back Beauty — One Rosebush at a Time*. Our little society has taken on a massive project that is beginning to stir the hearts and minds of people across this great nation. We

have begun networking with rose growers, rose societies, Master Gardeners, co-op extensions, nurseries and botanical gardens throughout the Southern Gulf Coast region. We have enlisted the community support of mayors, city councils, civic organizations, universities, public schools, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, churches and synagogues in an effort to reach our goal of providing beautiful healthy young rosebushes and letters

of encouragement to the survivors of the hurricane disasters of Katrina and Rita. In April and May we shipped 316 roses from Chamblee's Nursery in Tyler, TX, and 1,100 uplifting letters to affiliates of Habitat for Humanity and Friends of New Orleans. We will resume shipments in September when the weather is more hospitable to the transporting and planting of the roses.

Would you like to join us in making a positive impact on our fellow Americans?

lost so much. Your roses will bring hope, beauty and a sense of peace to people who have lost sight of these things. Your generous offer of beauty will help people remember 'normal'. I am so excited that you called and that we can be a part of this restoration of beauty to our battered Southern communities. Thank you so much for thinking of us.”

Edith Thompson ready to plant her rose.



all photos courtesy Lee Stevens

Would you like to share your passion for roses with people who need encouragement?

Judy Mayo and the Southwest Louisiana Rose Society in Lake Charles have graciously participated in housing and caring for the roses we have shipped to their local Habitat project and are awaiting Habitat's home dedication ceremony. The society members will be involved in the rose care education planned for the new home owners. These people really understand the meaning of sacrificial giving, because according to Mayo, several of them lost their own roses when Hurricane Rita hit their town. We were not aware of this society's losses when they agreed to participate with us in this honorable project. However, now that we realize the scope of their commitment to sharing their passion for roses, we have placed them on the list as future recipients.

Rod Downey, Master Gardener in Covington, LA, and his wonderful group of volunteers will be propagating old garden roses for this project beginning this fall. They have already conducted rose planting and rose care seminars for the recipients of Habitat homes in Saint Tammany West, LA.

Mary Jo Broussard, grounds director of the Mobile, AL, Botanical Gardens, has assumed responsibility for the roses that were shipped to her area Habitat for Humanity. This knowledgeable and tenacious woman at one point found herself to be the only employee

Edmund Woodfork with his rose and rose-growing supplies.



and caretaker for this 100-acre garden, and still she took on the responsibility of caring for 50 roses for other people.

Many volunteers have come forward to assist with this humanitarian effort. One particular shining star is Metairie, LA, social worker Sharon Lidenheimer. This indefatigable woman founded Friends of New Orleans, a volunteer group that is helping to clean that shattered city one yard at a time, from porch to curb. This group has been instrumental in restoring postal routes and encouraging their

neighbors to take heart once again as they see others actively helping to restore order to their community. Lidenheimer has seen first hand the destructive force of nature, but she has also experienced the healing power of beauty and love when she delivered the roses we sent and the letters of encouragement that accompanied them:

"I was working with a group of 30 volunteers from Lakeview Christian Center when I overheard two of them talking about a fellow church member who has had significant Katrina losses, is suffering post traumatic stress disorder (as am I and everyone around here) and who had resisted help getting her

Roses for the Restoring Roses to Southern Gardens project arrive in bloom.



"The roses are perennial, persistent and consistent. They show us that we are not forgotten."

home rehabilitated. One of the members took your rose to her and it was the first thing that got through to her. She cried tears of joy! These roses mean so much. They are alive. They are perennial, persistent and consistent. They link us to the past, to the French settlers who brought them here 300 years ago —



A South Louisiana resident plants her rose alongside a sign indicating her intention to rebuild.

and to the future as we re-settle this land. They show us that we are not forgotten. They are tangible. They truly are representative of God's love. She felt it. It was the first breakthrough any of her friends had seen." I was interested to find out that this woman contacted the clean up crew shortly after receiving her rose.

Would you like to spark some life into your society?

Here are some words of wisdom that fuel my own passion for this Herculean task. They come from very different sources, but they make a lot of sense:

- "One thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve." ~ Dr. Albert Schweitzer

- "Good intentions, like crying babies in church, should be carried out immediately." ~ Ann Landers

Restoring Roses to Southern Gardens is really more than a project. It is a personal way for individuals to participate in the recovery of our Gulf Coast. The June 21st front page article of the New York Times reinforces that 10 months after the storms, people in the South are struggling with enormous

burdens that have led many to depression and even some to suicide. The roses that will be given, and the letters of love that will be sent will not make everything better for these men, women and children, but they will know that others genuinely care about them and what they are going through. Kind words of comfort and gifts of beauty may actually hasten the healing of the human heart. The letters of gratitude we have received from rose recipients in the South indicate that we have helped rekindle hope in the lives of many people.

The American Rose Society, through the vision and direction of President Marilyn Wellan and efforts of ARS Headquarters staff, has joined this project and graciously provided rose care booklets, starter fertilizer and a wonderful letter of support for each person in our first four shipments of roses. They even included the ARS toll-free number that recipients may access if they have any rose-related questions in the future. ARS Headquarters will also refer them to a local rose society that would be willing to help them grow in their appreciation of rose culture.

Restoring Roses to Southern Gar-

dens is a win/win proposition. It creates public awareness of the needs of our fellow Americans, encourages individual and community involvement in a humanitarian cause, promotes the ARS and local rose societies (which potentially builds membership), and helps beautify our world.

If you answered yes to any of the questions you were just asked:

- Would you like to hear some good news from the South?

- Would you like to make a positive impact on your fellow Americans?

- Would you like to share your passion for roses with people who need encouragement?

- Would you like to spark some life into your society?

Then contact Lee Stevens, chairperson for Restoring Roses to Southern Gardens, and find out what you and your society can do to become part of this exciting and wonderful project. (Home phone — 951 787-4828; Cell phone — 951 205-2459; e-mail — davidandleestevens@yahoo.com) Please visit the Riverside Rose Society's beautiful website to see pictures and letters we have received from the South (www.riversiderose.org).



Restoring Roses to Southern Gardens — Lee Stevens
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