

watch!

Citizen CRAIG

What the newly minted American said to the President

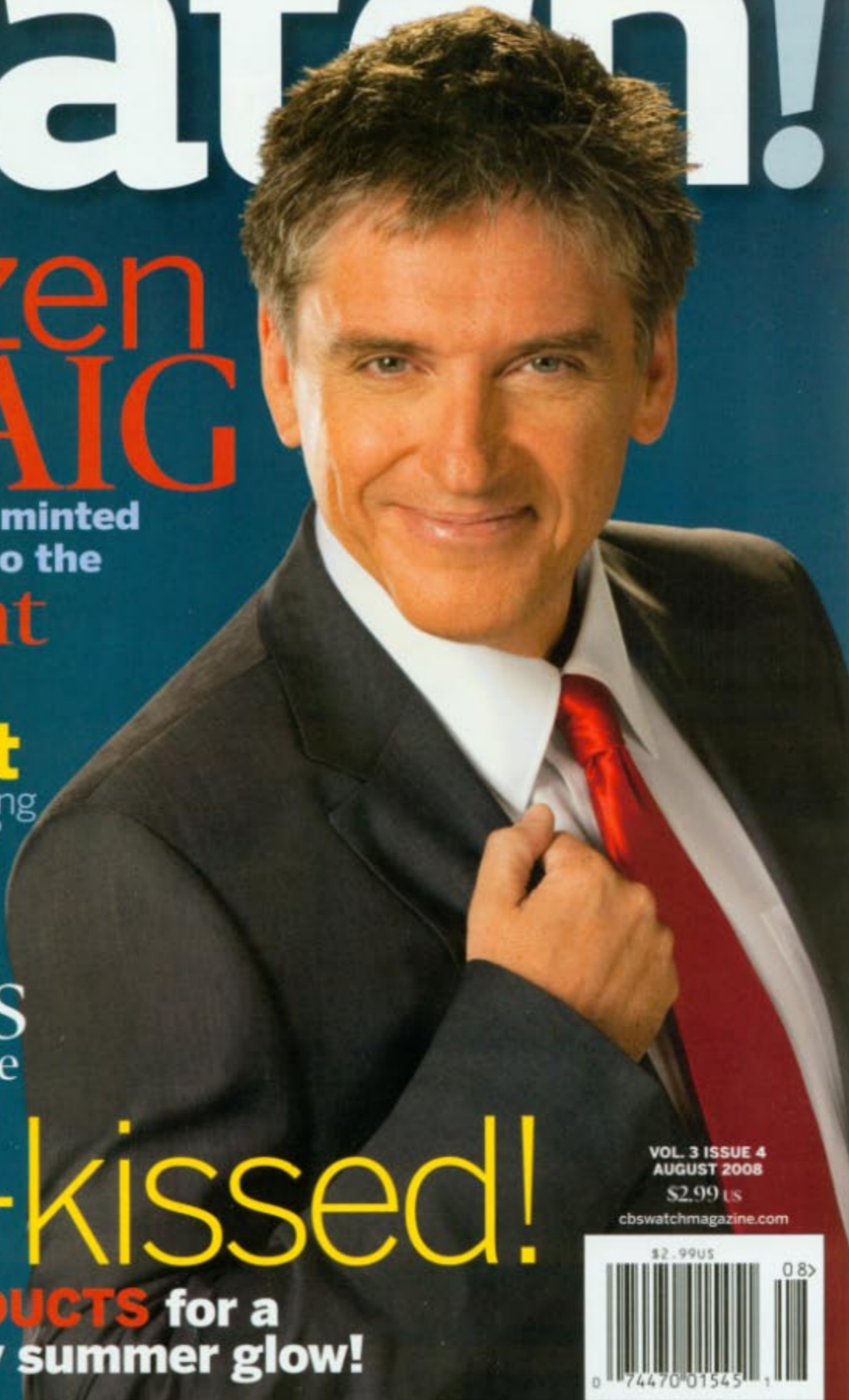
I.D. Theft

Who's impersonating your favorite stars?

BRIDAL FASHIONS that take the cake

sun-kissed!

9 HOT PRODUCTS for a celeb-worthy summer glow!



VOL. 3 ISSUE 4
AUGUST 2008

\$2.99 us

cbswatchmagazine.com

\$2.99US

08>



Lineup



FEATURES

26

Personal Politics

Mr. Ferguson goes to Washington: Craig Ferguson took his political commentary all the way to the White House. So just what did the *Late Late Show* host have to say to the president?

32

When Katrina Hit

New Orleans has endured a long road back to recovery. And despite inherently dangerous conditions, the city's CBS affiliate, WWL, has been there through it all, broadcasting before, during and after the storm.

48

Under a Watchful Eye

Someone's always watching on the set of *Big Brother*. Go behind the scenes for an exclusive look at television's most voyeuristic indulgence.

52

Wedded Bliss

Guiding Light's Crystal Chappell, Marcy Rylan and Gina Tognoni are going to the chapel in this season's hottest wedding wear.

IN EVERY ISSUE

10 EDITOR'S NOTE

15 QUICK TAKES

61 IN THE NOW

80 SIGN OFF

ON THE COVER: Craig Ferguson. Photograph by Robert Voets.

Transformations



New Orleans CBS affiliate WWL chronicled Hurricane Katrina before, during and after the storm.

Welcome to another edition of *Watch!* magazine, your source for the best in entertainment—and now sports, too. We've got another jam-packed issue, headlined by one of the funniest, most likable faces on late night—or any part of the day, come to think of it. For the better part of 2007, *Late Late Show* host Craig Ferguson has talked about becoming a U.S. citizen, and this summer it's official: Craig is one of us. And he went all the way to Washington, D.C., to talk about it.

"Their stories ... underscore the power television has to inform, enlighten and, in this case, save the lives of thousands of people."

with a keynote speech at the White House correspondents' dinner, which *Watch!* magazine has exclusively.

Turning to matters more serious, we dispatched contributing editor Jim Colucci and photographer Erica Berger to New Orleans to chronicle the market's struggle and recovery after Hurricane Katrina, as told through the eyes of the dedicated and talented reporters, anchors, camera operators and the manager of local CBS affiliate WWL. Their stories are poignant and inspiring and underscore the power television has to inform,

enlighten and, in this case, save the lives of thousands of people who suffered through this unimaginable catastrophe.

And finally, *Watch! CBS Sports*, which you can find on the back of this magazine, serves up yet another exciting edition, this time focusing exclusively on tennis. Late this summer, CBS will present the U.S. Open tennis championship, and to celebrate we've put together an awesome edition featuring interviews with Venus and Serena Williams, a look at the gender gap in professional tennis, and so much more.

Happy reading!

Jeremy Murphy
Editor In Chief



Watch! magazine's Jeremy Murphy with Angelique O'Neil, left, and Meagan McLaughlin.

watch!

cbswatchmagazine.com

Editor in Chief

Jeremy Murphy
jeremy.murphy@cbs.com

Publisher

Michael Rizzi
michael.rizzi@cbs.com

Creative Director

Angelique O'Neil

Managing Editor, Photography and Multimedia

Meagan McLaughlin

Managing Editor

Christopher Ross

Publication Manager

Mona Buehler

Watch! CBS Sports Project Manager/Editor

Jennifer Goddard

Newsstand Consultant

Ron Sklon

Circulation Director

Randy Silverman
randy.silverman@cbs.com

Contributing Editors

Rebecca Ascher-Walsh
Robin Brendle
Jerry Caraccioli
Jim Colucci
Jen Sabatelle

Contributors

Virginia Bell
Tom Caraccioli
Wendy Dymond
Dick Erberg
Kim Forrest
Nicole Lesson
Shelley Levitt
Rudy Martzke
Lynn Morgan
Marianne O'Leary
Michele Shapiro



Executive Vice President, Corporate Communications
Gil Schwartz

Senior Vice President
Dana McClintock

Senior Vice President, CBS Sports Communications
LeslieAnne Wade

Vice President, Photography
Gail Plautz



President/Custom Media
Fred Petrovsky • 888-626-8779
fred.petrovsky@mcmmurry.com

V.P./Creative Director

Beth Tomkow

Editors

Kelly Kramer
Jill Schildhouse

Art Directors

Sharon Seidl
Heidi Easudes
Maggie Connors

Custom Media Inquiries

Erin Zilis
888-626-8779
erin.zilis@mcmmurry.com

Prep Specialist

Sonia Washington

Imaging Specialist

Dane Nordine

V.P./Production

Dan Brenner

Production Manager

Tanya Clark

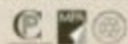
Vice President of Database Marketing

Patrick Kehoe

Advertising
watchmediakit.com

Basic subscription rate: Six issues is \$11.99, 12 issues is \$23.99. Canada and foreign surface add \$12 extra per year, payable in U.S. funds. *Watch!* is published six times a year. To subscribe, send check or money order to *Watch!* magazine, PO Box 905, NY, NY 10102-2347, or call 800-532-8190. You can also subscribe online at cbswatchmagazine.com.

Copyright © 2008 by COG Ventures Inc. All rights reserved. *Watch!* is published by McMurry. E-mail your letters to the editor to watch@cbs.com. Please send all editorial comments, questions or manuscripts to Watch!magazine.cbs@CBS.com. 51 W. 52nd Street, Office 405/4th Floor, New York, NY 10019. Unsolicited material must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope. This publication may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the NRPC. Requests for reprint permission should be sent to McMurry Campus Center, 1010 E. Missouri Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85014.





When > Katrina

CBS affiliate WWL chronicles the long road back for the Crescent City

By Jim Colucci >

Photographs by Erica Berger

HIT



Chris Slaughter is still angry. Nearly three years after the destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina, his face reddens as he recounts what happened—and more specifically, what failed to happen—in his hometown of New Orleans. Now, as he eats brunch in the sunlit main room at Arnaud's restaurant in the city's fabled French Quarter, the memories still flow back vividly.

On this Sunday afternoon, he can relive that weekend, play by play: Katrina, downgraded to a Category 3 hurricane by the time of Louisiana landfall, merely grazed the metropolitan area's eastern edge, and could itself have been a lot worse. Yet the effects of the storm—that is, the man-made effects of canal levees which infamously failed to live up to the protective assurances of the Army Corps of Engineers—left 80 percent of New Orleans underwater, destroying more than 200,000 homes and a great many more lives.

As the then-assistant news director of CBS' local affiliate, WWL, Slaughter always knew that his staff was prepared for the worst; the TV station and its parent company, the Belo Corp. of Dallas, had previously collaborated on an emergency evacuation and broadcast plan. WWL employees would ensure their families' safe retreat, then split apart in teams to a few predetermined, secured locations: a TV studio at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, and a transmitter tower in Gretna, on the west side of the Mississippi River, fortified by 14 feet of concrete at its base. "And at some point we had to ask ourselves, 'How could we have supplies prepositioned and plans to take care of our people, and our government have nothing of the sort?'" he remarks.



Chris Slaughter

Number of homes destroyed by breaches in federally designed and funded levees and not covered under the federal housing recovery plan: 200,000



EARLY WARNINGS In the year prior to the storm, Slaughter says, WWL reporters had asked the city on several occasions for details of its hurricane plan: How will you get to people who don't own vehicles, or can't drive? To people who have medical problems? "In each of the cases, they assured us unequivocally that they had a plan, and they would get these people out. But when the storm hit, their plan fell apart," Slaughter says, recalling the widely circulated image of the city's would-be rescue buses, felled by floodwaters in their dispatch yard. "And these are the people who, in a lot of the cases, died as a result."

In 2005, now-WWL reporter Maya Rodriguez was working on a newscast in Naples, Fla. Even her station, hundreds of miles away, had always been worried about New Orleans, which earlier that year had hosted the National Hurricane Conference. "We sent our chief meteorologist, who did a live shot from the city," Rodriguez remembers. "He said, 'If you think we're not that prepared in Florida, you should see New Orleans! They're not prepared at all.'"

WWL president and general manager Albert "Bud" Brown, who had worked for Belo stations across the U.S., had always hoped the job would lead him to New Orleans. It did, auspiciously enough, just two months before the storm. Since then, Brown has been taking visitors on what he calls a Tragedy Tour of the worst-hit parts of town. His colorful narrative is a mix of local legend and loss of life, delivered with alternating emotion and resignation, the latter seemingly a defense mechanism for someone who has

seen, and reported, so much. "Among the three levels of government, there's plenty of blame to go around," Brown says with deliberate understatement.

But in stark contrast to government agencies slowly doling out Road Home rebuilding money, one institution has continually gone to "superhuman lengths" to see New Orleans through stormy times, says *Broadcasting & Cable* contributing editor Allison Romano: the press. "It was very difficult, with any given station's employees going through so much personal loss and devastation in their own lives," Romano explains. "Yet they continued to go to work and put out the news. Even in the days immediately after,

when they didn't even know who they were broadcasting to."

Romano says that while all of New Orleans' network news teams improvised ingenious solutions in the wake of the storm, WWL, with its backup transmitter out of flood's way, became the only station never knocked off the air. And as a few of the station's anchors would later hear, that was a critical distinction. Because in a situation like New Orleans', broadcast television has the power to save lives.

HIS **COLORFUL** NARRATIVE IS A MIX OF LOCAL LEGEND **AND LOSS** OF LIFE, DELIVERED WITH ALTERNATING **EMOTION AND RESIGNATION**, THE LATTER SEEMINGLY A DEFENSE MECHANISM FOR **SOMEONE WHO HAS SEEN, AND REPORTED**, SO MUCH.

THE NOT-SO-CALM BEFORE THE STORM On Saturday, Aug. 27, as early reports began coming in of Katrina's potential power, WWL nighttime anchor Dennis Woltering sent his family on ahead to a wedding in Austin and reported to the station to begin coanchoring what would become continuous, commercial-free coverage. As per the plan, that night half the WWL crew—including news executive producer Mikel Schaefer and morning anchors



Eric Paulsen and Sally Ann Roberts—prepared to head up to Baton Rouge. But before they left town, Paulsen and Roberts were appalled to see their fellow citizens doing—nothing.

Figuring they'd weathered storms before, "[People] didn't get it," Roberts says. "So Eric and I decided before we went on the air Sunday morning that we had to scare some people."

"We were yelling at people to get the hell out of town," Paulsen adds animatedly. "We said, 'If you live through the storm, you're going to hate the aftermath.'"

Roberts said it succinctly as she left the air on Sunday: "Pray, prepare and proceed out the door." Later, a woman came up to me and thanked me as she recited that. She said, "When you said that, I knew it was really time to leave."

That night, as Katrina roared into town, concerns arose—incorrectly, it turns out—that the WWL building, at the north-eastern edge of the French Quarter, might be prone to flooding. As would ultimately continue all the way through WWL's 24/7 coverage, different permutations of WWL anchors—morning mixed with night, two men, two women, groupings the station had never before tried—had been taking three- or four-hour shifts in front of the cameras. At 10:30 p.m., Dennis Woltering was on the air. He was interviewing the mayor by phone when the order came through in his earpiece: "Wrap it up. We have to go—now!" Woltering then joined a mass of his co-workers hurrying toward presumed safety via "vertical evacuation" at the nearby high-rise Hyatt hotel.

But there was another big problem at the Hyatt. Concerns arose—correctly, it turns out—that the hotel's oversized windows would shatter, as the pebbles embedded in New Orleans' asphalt rooftops became projectiles in high winds. And so evacuees were instructed to leave their bags behind the closed doors of their rooms' bathrooms and then report to the conference level to camp out, shelter style.

August is a sticky month in bayou country, and the ballroom, Slaughter remembers, was hot; he eventually opted to sleep in

a car under the hotel's covered carport instead. By this point, WWL's Baton Rouge operation had already become the sole source of local video. "The other stations had cut and run," Slaughter says. "In some cases, they left virtually none of their crew behind to cover the news. We were continuing to broadcast over the air. It was interesting to see all the TV sets people had brought with them, and how many all of a sudden had rabbit ears."

WHEN THE LEVEES BROKE Shortly before 9 a.m. on Monday, Paulsen and Roberts were on the air in Baton Rouge when action reporter Bill Capo ran in to read a breaking news bulletin he'd gotten off the wire. Everyone's worst nightmare was coming true—the levees were breaking in New Orleans.

Meanwhile, back in the Quarter, Slaughter and Brown had returned to find that the station, although slightly wind damaged, was still operational. The city's power was down, but WWL's backup generators had kept even the air conditioning running smoothly. "At first, it was no different than any other Monday with a heavy thunderstorm outside," Slaughter remembers. But as the morning wore on, systems started to fail—first the public service scanners, then the phones.

By 11 a.m., Slaughter was dispatching news vans to cover damage to a spookily stilled city. "I knew early on that we had big problems when I sent crews out to areas not far from the station," he says, "and they started coming back with footage of people walking through chest-deep water where there shouldn't have been chest-deep water."

When gas mains ruptured, cameramen captured the eerie spectacle of houses submerged, yet on fire. Immediately, as many as half the WWL staffers in the building began to realize that their own homes were, or were about to be, underwater. But they still had to keep going and gathering the news. As Woltering says, "There was still so much to come."

Later on Monday, security in the abandoned city was beginning to become a problem, so the decision was made to head for the



Eric Paulsen and Sally Ann Roberts



Mikel Schaefer

transmitter site. By then, the Gretna facility had lost its running water, and the team built a latrine in the nearby woods. Woltering began shuttling a dozen or so co-workers to his undamaged house in nearby Algiers to take showers and raid the fridge.

Meanwhile, in Baton Rouge, Roberts told viewers, "If you haven't left by now, and you have to evacuate to your attic, make sure you take an ax or something to cut through your roof." It was like being in the Twilight Zone," she remembers. Paulsen, a WWL veteran since 1977, found out about flooding in his Uptown neighborhood at a press conference. "I never shed a tear over my house," he says. "It was something I knew I could replace. But I cried like a baby over the city."

Paulsen was among the first to go up in a helicopter, with Houston sister station KHOU, for a view of the devastation. "I'm very familiar with the city," he says. "But when it's a lake, things just don't look the same. Flying over the twin bridges toward Slidell, looking at the I-10, it looked like God was playing dominoes with these massive, hundred-ton roadway sections."

REUNITE, REGROUP, REPORT By Wednesday, when gunfire and looting had set in, WWL switched from two- to three-man crews: a cameraman, a reporter and someone to drive the van for a quick getaway. The WWL vans never encountered a problem, as a Dallas station's crew did. But, Chris Merrifield, the station's creative services manager, did become a hero, rescuing a man from a sinking car as the cameras rolled.

Later that day, Gretna's Oakwood Mall was set ablaze by looters. "It was hard to wrap my mind around the idea that people who lived here were destroying whatever was left," Woltering says. And so the decision was made to regroup the entire WWL news staff in Baton Rouge, where crews were dispatched to drive back down to cover New Orleans for only hours at a time.

The staff reunion was an emotional one, Mikel Schaefer remembers. People had been working "quietly upset," but as each layer of optimism peeled away, staffers would occasionally take breaks to find a place to lose their composure. There was a lot of hugging. "When my nighttime producer, who I had gotten fairly close to and worked a lot with, came in, she started crying," Schaefer says. "She said, 'I knew I'd do that as soon as I saw you.'"

NEWS YOU CAN USE Five days into the crisis, veteran cameraman and New Orleans native Tom Moore captured infamous images of death outside the New Orleans Convention Center. "There were people begging for help," he recalls. "To take that long to help people? It was the biggest screw-up I've ever seen. I saw it firsthand, and it'll be in me forever."

Coverage like Moore's began to extend farther and farther, through on-the-fly deals that parent company Belo had made with digital cable operators and broadband providers in other cities. Exiles in Houston's Astrodome, for example, could watch streaming WWL video through Yahoo.

But even as these local stations improvised and innovated to provide detailed coverage, other news operations, many say, missed the real stories. When her New Orleans office was rendered unusable, Elaine Christoph, a media buyer at Universal McCann, was displaced to Houston, where she caught WWL on cable. "That was a great help, because when you would watch the national news, you knew you weren't getting info that you needed or could use."

Slaughter agrees. Some of the national coverage gave America a skewed impression of post-Katrina New Orleans, he says. Many

continued on page 39



ST. BERNARD'S NATIVE SON

"Some just may be tempted to put an asterisk on [its] tombstone: St. Bernard, 1780-2005*. But ... for those who suffered through the horrors of Katrina and still suffer today, the pain will fade and the parish will rise again."

—Mikel Schaefer, *Lost in Katrina*

"I'm a New Orleanian through and through," WWL's assistant news director Mikel Schaefer says proudly. In recent years, Schaefer, who has worked at the station since 1987, has lived in the due-western suburb of Metairie—where his house endured two feet of floodwaters. But Schaefer had attended high school in Katrina's hardest-hit area, the county just east of New Orleans called St. Bernard parish. "St. Bernard is where I feel like I grew up and became a man," he reminisces. "The boy stuff—going through puberty, first kiss, first drink. It's very special to me." So when Katrina dealt such instant and massive destruction, the Chalmette High School grad found his mission. Sitting in WWL's makeshift control room in Baton Rouge, Schaefer composed what he calls a "rambling tribute" to his home parish—one that he would

eventually reprint as the ending lines of *Lost in Katrina*.

With two toddler sons at home and a 24-hour newsroom to oversee, "I had no business writing a book," Schaefer now admits, laughing. But fearing that the decimation in St. Bernard would not get the coverage the national press was already affording to New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, the would-be author bought a digital tape recorder and headed south. Using his press credentials—and his familiar face—to circumvent the National Guard and navigate the recently cleared streets, the native son of St. Bernard was amazed to find that "the mud was everywhere, and it stunk. I looked for people to interview on the streets—but almost no one was there."

As Schaefer continued to moonlight in the parish before

his evening news shift, friends eventually referred him to friends. "People were really wrecked," he explains. "Some would talk right away and give great stories, and some would have to take their time." In all, 27,000 homes—and 67,000 lives—had been destroyed in St. Bernard alone. Because the floodwaters had come at night, without warning and from multiple directions, "people were fighting for their lives within minutes," Schaefer explains. "Glass doors exploded like aquarium walls. People were in their attics, with the water still rising. One friend I grew up with used power tools to cut a hole in his roof and then had to stay there, with the storm still raging and debris whizzing by." In the storm's aftermath, Schaefer adds, physical peril then gave way to emotional trauma for St. Bernard's famously close-knit clans.

"Katrina was like a 'people bomb.' It took families that had been together for decades and spread them out all along the lower U.S."

But despite such hardships, what Schaefer says he finds most amazing was the teamwork and resourcefulness the residents of St. Bernard were still able to muster in the midst of crisis: when help was infamously slow to come, residents of the parish's fishing communities took to rescuing each other in boats. And as they told Schaefer in reaction to his book, they're glad for the world to know it. Documenting this moment in their history, Schaefer says, has given so many of his former neighbors closure, and even hope. "I do everything I can in my little space," he says. "And if other people do that in theirs, we can make things better."



reports, for example, focused almost exclusively on the devastation of the city's mostly black Lower Ninth Ward, playing up implications that government help was slow in coming for racial reasons. Locals do agree that New Orleans—home to a vibrant black community that birthed the blues and Louis Armstrong—is certainly not without its racial tensions. But "every group was incensed at the coverage," explains Roberts, who rescued a carload of possessions, including a photo of her namesake grandmother, from five feet of floodwaters in her house in New Orleans East. "In St. Bernard, a predominantly white community, the entire parish was underwater. Or people would say, 'What about Lakeview?' The damage was so massive, and the suffering mind-boggling. And every race, at every income level, was affected. It was a nondiscriminatory flood."

On Sept. 14, WWL resumed its regular programming by switching to an episode of *The Late Show with David Letterman*—complete with commercials, thanks to what the station's sales director Mike Zikmund calls "a MacGyver act" in terms of technology. Like most of the station's nonjournalist employees, Zikmund's sales staff had scattered around the country after the storm, crafting their plan for recovery only by phone. Zikmund himself took refuge in Missouri, after his home in New Orleans' Broadmoor section was submerged in eight feet of water. Zikmund says coming back to the office gave people a break from worrying about mold and mess. It also gave them a working phone, a computer or a fax machine from which to handle insurance claims.

T

THE PARADE ROUTE TO RECOVERY

In February 2006, Dennis Woltering and his wife joined their club (or "krewe") for one of the year's earliest Mardi Gras processions. As the newsman in the funny costume helped pull the Krewe du Vieux float through the neighborhoods of Faubourg Marigny and the French Quarter, "there was so much emotion," he remembers. "So many people came out. It was like a celebration that the city was going to come back."

Indeed, with the city's most famous attractions in the Quarter having been virtually untouched by Katrina, New Orleans was at least partially back in business, hosting Mardi Gras.

And the city has had help. New Orleans has become, as Roberts puts it, "the mission field," where religious and civic-minded volunteers from groups like Habitat for Humanity, the Arkansas Builders and most recently Brad Pitt's Make It Right Foundation have shown up with hammers in hand. "The whole country has gotten behind rebuilding New Orleans," Paulsen says. "They realize it's a one-of-a-kind place in this country that is truly worth saving."

Of course, not everyone has come back. Some folks, Zikmund says, have put down roots in newfound cities. And as the WWL news team often reports, those pioneers who do return to reclaim blighted homes are often dispirited to have abandoned structures or bare concrete slabs for neighbors.

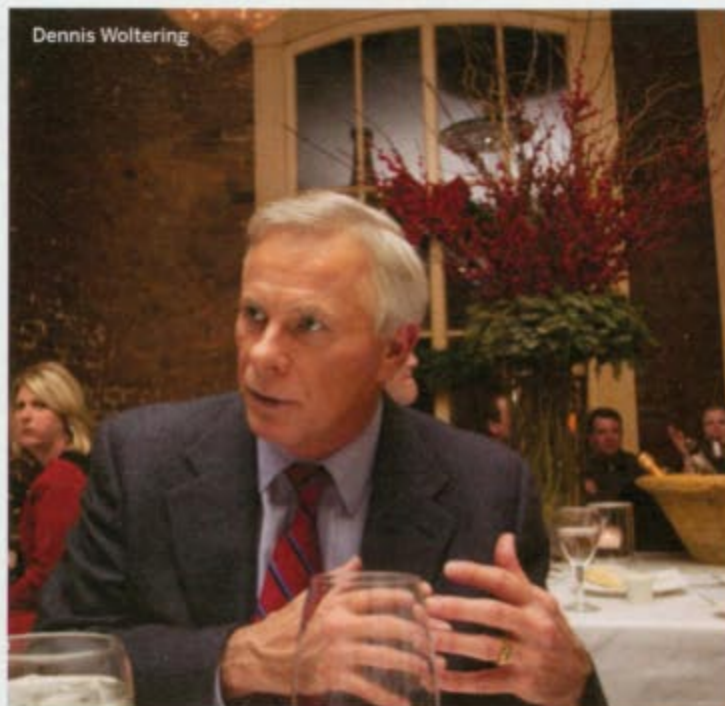
According to the Nielsen Co.'s market ranking in fall 2007, the New Orleans DMA, or TV market, had slipped 11 notches in population ranking, from No. 43 before the storm to No. 54. "I think by the time it's all over with, we'll probably be a bit smaller of a market," Zikmund predicts. But he also foresees change that may

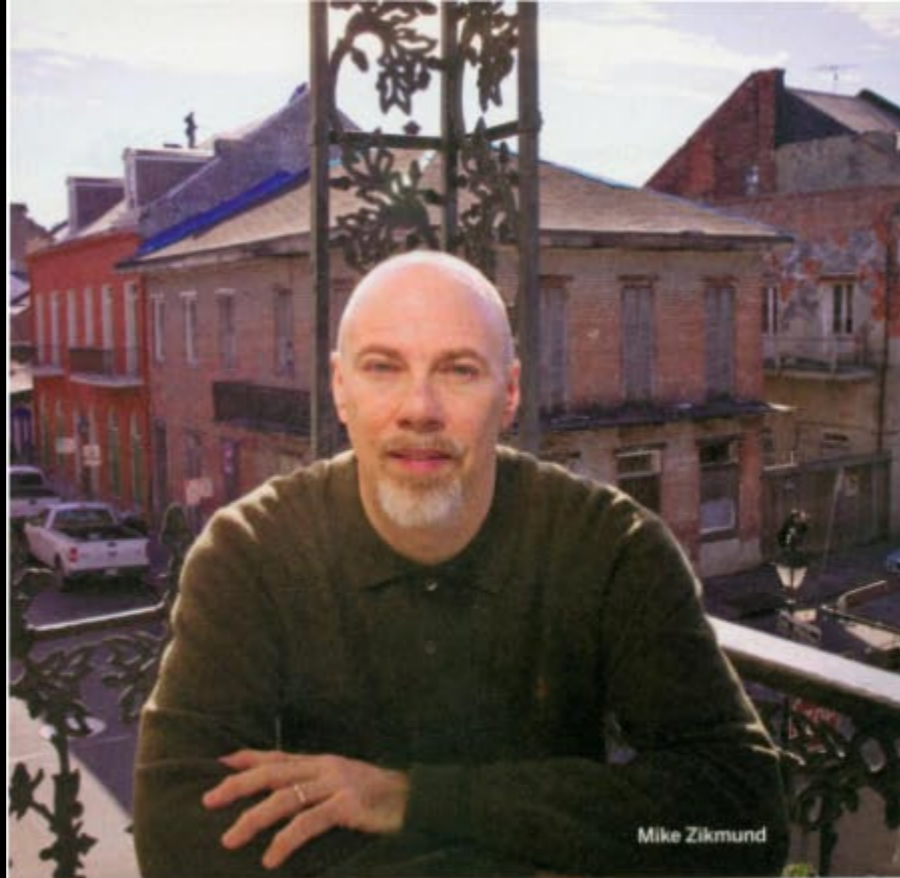
help New Orleans attract more ad dollars and corporate attention. Because the city's poorest residents seem to have been the least likely to return, New Orleans overall may end up a more affluent market than before.

BACK IN BUSINESS Along with so much of New Orleans' infrastructure, Nielsen's ability to compile TV ratings for the market had been washed away with the storm. It wasn't until July 2007 that the ratings were up and running again, by which point ad sales executives like Zikmund and buyers like Elaine Christoph had had to learn to make do. But first, they had to counter a lot of false impressions.

As recently as December 2007, a poll by the University of New Orleans showed that roughly one quarter of Americans still believed that parts of New Orleans remained underwater, while one-third thought that the French Quarter had been the hardest hit. And so, Zikmund says, he would use one of his most powerful weapons: WWL's reporting itself. "We would have meetings where we would show videotaped footage of what was going on, how the population was coming back."

IN FEBRUARY 2006, DENNIS WOLTERING AND HIS WIFE JOINED THEIR CLUB (OR "KREWE") FOR ONE OF THE YEAR'S EARLIEST MARDI GRAS PROCESSIONS. "SO MANY PEOPLE CAME OUT. IT WAS LIKE A CELEBRATION THAT THE CITY WAS GOING TO COME BACK."





So although the overall New Orleans ad market shrank from \$106.6 million in 2004 to just over \$80 million in 2005, those numbers are expected to rebound this year. It already speaks to the health of the New Orleans market, Zikmund notes, that last year, WWL had its strongest year on record for ad sales.

And when the ratings switch did flip back on in July 2007, WWL was still, as it had been for years, No. 1 in newscast viewership. "WWL has been a dynasty for over 20 years in this market," Christoph explains. "But the WWL brand, and its slogan, 'The Spirit of Louisiana,' really served them in time of crisis. I think it goes to prove the deep loyalty that people in the city feel for the station."

But it hasn't been easy. WWL has endured a 60 percent turnover in staff since the storm; some flooded-out veterans were forced to move away, while many young reporters like Rodriguez are new in town, eager to cover the Big Story in the Big Easy. Despite the churn, the newsroom is now larger than before, and it needs to be—Slaughter and his staff now not only program the WWL news, but also have taken over the news broadcasts of the former UPN affiliate UPL and inaugurated a 24-hour channel, News Watch 15, on Cox cable.

And the outfit is up for the challenge. "When you work in news, you may think you're a sensitive person, and that you go into a situation clearheaded, trying to understand what everyone is going through," Slaughter says. "But an experience like this still changes you. It makes you a much more sensitive and introspective person, and makes you less likely to fall prey to easy generalizations and stereotypes. It has made the local media here much better reporters, because in a lot of cases they have gone through it themselves."

In the Internet era, Katrina proved that local news matters. In 2005, WWL was one of only four news organizations that year—and the sole local New Orleans station—to win electronic broadcasting's prestigious George Foster Peabody Award, distributed by the University of Georgia. "We're not out there doing Paris Hilton stories," Brown says of striving to serve his community. "These are





Veteran cameraman and New Orleans native Tom Moore with news anchor Maya Rodriguez

stories that matter. Whether people are going to get the money to rebuild their homes. Whether their families will be separated. Whether guys who are dishonest will be caught. Whether the city is spending relief money correctly. In terms of serving the public, when has local television ever had this important a job to do?"

A CITY REBORN Today, the Katrina story is far from over. Now, instead of reporting on the deluge, WWL covers the trickle of life back into New Orleans' hardest-hit areas. "We've felt no qualms about being accused of boosterism," Slaughter says, "because something like the reopening of a grocery store is a legitimate news event. It could have a cascade effect to lead people to reconsider moving back to their neighborhoods." And the station, Woltering says, continues to push, advocating for improvements like levee redesign, insurance reform and restoration of Louisiana's storm-defusing coastal lands. "It's something we should do for the benefit of the community," he explains. "I think that we've had to be more aggressive with public officials."

But as even a tourist to the city soon learns, the city affectionately nicknamed the Big Easy moves with a rhythm all its own. "Many of the things we love about New Orleans are the things we hate," explains Paulsen paradoxically. "The laissez-faire attitude

TODAY, THE KATRINA STORY IS FAR FROM OVER. NOW, INSTEAD OF REPORTING ON THE DELUGE, WWL COVERS THE TRICKLE OF LIFE BACK INTO NEW ORLEANS' HARDEST-HIT AREAS. "WE'VE FELT NO QUALMS ABOUT BEING ACCUSED OF BOOSTERISM," SLAUGHTER SAYS, "BECAUSE SOMETHING LIKE THE REOPENING OF A GROCERY STORE IS A LEGITIMATE NEWS EVENT."

and the cliqueishness can sometimes keep things from growing, but they're elements that we also like here. It's a city of contradictions in many ways." And there have always been big problems to overcome, even before 2005. The city's schools, for example, have always been among the worst in the nation—although as the anchor speculates, returning residents who have experienced education elsewhere may demand that to change.

"It's going to take a long time, but I think New Orleans will come back

more vibrant and vital than it ever was," Woltering says hopefully. Brown shares that optimism, noting that every day, on his way to work, he likes to loop around a few extra blocks of the Quarter en route to the station's garage. "It feels good to remind myself why I love New Orleans and why I'm staying here."

"Katrina really brought out the heart in a lot of people," Roberts rhapsodizes. "It showed us that we are still a people who care about one another." And so, although "*Laissez les bons temps rouler*" has always been the party-hearty mantra in this jazz-infused, Bacchanalian town, maybe for newly reborn New Orleanians, "the good times" of old will no longer be good enough. It may be time to change just one word in that famous Frenglish saying.

Let the Better Times Roll. **M**



Vested Interest

Hill Harper may be best known as a *CSI: New Yorker*, but in his downtime, the actor, author and producer is also a part-owner of the International House, a boutique hotel three blocks outside New Orleans' French Quarter. *Watch!* caught up with the fast-moving man of many trades to talk about his investments, both financial and emotional, in the Crescent City.

Watch! You were born in the Midwest and went to school in the Northeast. What is your connection to New Orleans?

Hill Harper: One of my best friends from Brown, Sean Cummings, would invite me to come to New Orleans with him, and I fell in love with the essence and soul of the city. It's a true melting pot, and uniquely American in terms of its people, art and energy.

W: You've written a book [called *Letters to a Young Brother: MANifest Your Destiny*], started a philanthropic foundation—why a hotel?

Harper: After college, Sean became a successful developer in New Orleans and asked me if I wanted to be part of redeveloping this historic landmark mercantile building. So in 1998, I scraped together all the money I had, and it's been a wonderful thing. It turns out that the hospitality business is very similar to acting. With both, you're trying to give someone a great experience.

W: Did the hotel sustain damage during Hurricane Katrina?

Harper: The lobby and basement, where we had many offices, flooded. The worst loss, though, was that one of our 88 employees died in the storm. But I'm very proud that we were one of the few businesses in the city to continue paying our employees while we were shut down. That was Sean's idea, because he felt that the people are the heartbeat of New Orleans, and the city couldn't afford for them to move away to look for jobs. That cost a lot, and many business folks would say it was a mistake. But we felt it was an investment in New Orleans' future.

W: You speak passionately about the International House. What part are you proudest of?

Harper: We were able to bring a modern feel but still keep New Orleans' soulful essence. Every room has black-and-white photos by Herman Leonard of the city's jazz musicians, and CDs of local music. When we first walked through the building, which had been vacant for many years, I saw doors in the basement for segregated bathrooms. It struck me how amazing it was to be an African-American in the position of investing in a hotel where, at one point, the service people working there couldn't use the bathrooms. Sean still has one of those doors.

W: Which would you rather watch—*CSI: NY* or *CSI: NO*?

Harper: Actually, when they were planning the third and final *CSI*, I know it came down to two cities: New York or New Orleans. I love anything highlighting the greatness of New Orleans and its diversity. Both the hotel and the city have had to weather the storm, so to speak. But we'll thrive.

