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## **New Orleans City Park – A report on our status and progress over the two years since Hurricane Katrina struck.**

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**Do what you can  
With what you have  
Where you are.**

--Teddy Roosevelt

**What a long, strange trip it's been.**

-- Grateful Dead

In the two years since Hurricane Katrina hit, New Orleans City Park has been like the little engine that could, we just keep overcoming obstacles, no matter how many are placed in our path.

Donors, volunteers, board members and staff have done Teddy Roosevelt proud as they support, sweat, guide and continually strive to repair and build a better park for the citizens of Greater New Orleans.

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More details appear below, but here are the Cliffs Notes:

On August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina dealt a devastating blow to New Orleans City Park.

- 90 percent of the 1,300 acre park was under anywhere from one to eight feet of water.
- The park sustained \$43 million in damages including 122 damaged buildings.
- The saltwater that entered the park killed or damaged most all the grass including that on three golf courses and most of the tender vegetation (The Botanical Garden) with which it came in contact.

- The Park’s Administration Building was under four feet of water: archives lost, computers ruined and records soaked.
- Over 1,000 trees were toppled or extensively damaged. Another 1,000 subsequently died.
- Sections of the Maintenance Building collapsed and virtually every vehicle and piece of equipment the Park owned were destroyed. That includes tractors, bucket trucks, end-loaders, bush hogs, golf carts, everything.
- Before the hurricane, City Park had 260 employees – a combination of full-time, part-time and seasonal. Given our inability to meet payroll, all but 23 employees were laid off. Today the park has 46 full-time employees and is budgeted to grow to 64 in the coming months.

**What have you done for me lately?** Citizens, corporations and foundations across the country have been incredibly supportive of the park. At the same time, we sometimes hear folks questioning why the citizens of New Orleans don’t quit their whining, get about their business and pull themselves up by their bootstraps. With regard to the park, we’ve gone through so many pairs of bootstraps, our supplier is on backorder.

In many instances we not only want to repair a facility but improve it. As an example, a local foundation gave us \$1 million to restore the Botanical Gardens. Since most all of the plants and shrubs had to be removed from the garden, we took advantage of the ‘clean slate’ to install new irrigation and electrical services. Had we waited for governmental assistance the Botanical Gardens would likely still be closed and the government would not have paid for the new irrigation system. Variations of this example are played out countless times as we work to return a better City Park to the citizens of Greater New Orleans.

Here’s what we have reopened:

2005			2006												2007			
October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	
																		Tennis Courts (Hard Surface)
																		Equest Farms
																		Soccer Fields
																		Botanical Garden
																		Pavilion of the Two Sisters
																		Golf Driving Range
																		Storyland
																		Pan American Stadium (day use)
																		Softball Quadraplex
																		Tennis Courts (Clay Surface)
																		Tad Gormley Stadium
																		Marconi Meadows
																		Amusement Park

As finances allow, we will open facilities such as the Golf Courses, the Administration Building and The Casino Building.

**Show me the money.**

The park sustained \$43 million in damages and the majority of those damages were attributable not to the fierceness of Katrina’s winds but rather due to floodwaters caused by the failure of the federal levee and flood protection system.

Another arm of the federal government, FEMA, has been tasked to help restore the park. A project worksheet, as referenced below, is basically the same thing as an insurance claim. The following graphic shows FEMA’s progress since the hurricane on August 29, 2005:

6 months later	6 project worksheets completed	\$6,500 received or obligated
12 months later	26 project worksheets completed	\$720,000 received or obligated
18 months later	45 project worksheets completed	\$2 million received or obligated
24 months later	410 project worksheets completed	\$10 million received or obligated

By the end of the rebuilding process, we believe over 600 individual damage claims will be processed yielding between \$20 million and \$25 million in repair dollars. It is likely the process will last another 2-5 years.

The park is appreciative of FEMA’s help but we realized early on it was going to be slow in arriving and would never equal the total damages incurred by the park. Consequently we have been aggressive in our fundraising efforts. We have raised \$20 million toward Katrina related park repairs and another \$10 million toward the implementation of the park’s master plan - City Park 2018. We are committed to not just repairing the park, but to rebuilding an even better park.

**Sweat Equity**

Local, national, and international volunteers have been absolutely incredible. Over 13,000 volunteers have invested over 66,000 hours (the equivalent of 32 people working full time for one year) to help restore the park. The cash value of their donated hours totals \$1.2 million. They have picked up trash, removed tree limbs, painted fences, strung lights, potted plants, dug holes, entered data, you name it – they have done it.

**Pictures tell the Story**

The following pictures highlight many of the improvements that have been made at the park over the past two years.



Botanical Garden – Rose Garden

The Botanical Garden has been rebuilt with well over \$1 million in donated funds.



Volunteers have been up for any task including the pressure washing and painting of the Old Golf Clubhouse.



One of 2,000 trees that died as a result of wind and floodwaters



Five of 500 trees the park has replanted over the past two years.



Destroyed train coach



New locomotive and coach donated by a corporate donor



Tad Gormley Stadium – water reached the horizontal section of the field goal bars



Tad Gormley Stadium has undergone renovations totaling more than \$1 million to date and is slated for another \$1.2 million in upgrades and repairs in the next few months. An additional \$3 million in improvements at Pan American Stadium are also underway or committed.



All of the rides in our Amusement Park, including the bumper cars, sustained major damage.



The Amusement Park reopened in February 2007 and visitors were welcomed with over \$3 million worth of improvements including several new rides such as the Scrambler pictured above.

## **Optimistic but Pragmatic**

Even though we have made substantial and impressive progress, there is still a tremendous amount of work left to do.



The park's Golf Clubhouse was destroyed and will be demolished. Our three 18-hole golf courses which previously generated substantial revenue for the park have not yet been repaired and reopened.



Nearly two years after the hurricane, FEMA has determined that the park's Administration Building is over 50 percent damaged and needs to be torn down and built anew. Staff will have to wait another two years before vacating their temporary trailer offices.

## **Additional New Orleans City Park Information**

### **New Orleans City Park**

Over 150 years old, one mile wide and three miles long comprising a total of 1,300 acres, New Orleans City Park is one of the ten largest urban parks in the country. It is located in the heart of the city and is the largest recreation area for the entire metropolitan area.

### **Brief History**

Once the site of Allard Plantation facing Bayou St. John, City Park's 1,300 acres offer visitors a sample of the city's riches both in fine art and natural splendor. City Park is home of the New Orleans Museum of Art and the largest collection of mature live oaks in the world. Trees in the oldest grove are over 800 years old.

Today's City Park is distinguished by its large menu of recreational activities as well as by its natural beauty. City Park has a special place in the hearts of generations of New Orleanians and is a must for visitors to the city. A popular place to picnic, play a favorite sport, wander through its gardens or take a boat ride, the park hosts **11 million visitors each year** (pre-Katrina).

### **Attractions**

City Park has dozens of attractions that touch the lives of nearly every Greater New Orleans resident. Most (with the exception of the three golf courses) have reopened.

*The Amusement Park* featuring one of the few remaining antique, carved wooden carousels in the country. The carousel was 100 years old in 2006.

*Storyland* – A children's fairy tale theme park featuring twenty-six larger than life storybook exhibits for kids to climb on, slide down or pretend to be their favorite character within.

*New Orleans Botanical Garden* – The Botanical Garden is a lush 12 acre site set aside for the indulgence of man and nature.

*Celebration in the Oaks* – A holiday light extravaganza that generates 13 percent of the park's annual operating budget.

*New Orleans Museum of Art* – The New Orleans Museum of Art is considered one of the finest museums in the South.

*Sidney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden* – Opened in 2003, the Besthoff Sculpture garden features over 30 works of world-renowned sculptures in a beautifully landscaped area featuring mature live oak trees.

*Couturie Forest & Arboretum* – A 33 acre natural forest with a one-mile arboretum trail. Birders love the forest which also sports the highest point in all of New Orleans. Sixty feet above sea level, we recommend oxygen for folks who plan to reach the summit!

*Weddings & Catering* – Venues within the park host hundreds of weddings and other functions throughout the year. The park is the largest non-hotel caterer in the City.

*Historic Structures* – The Peristyle, Popp Bandstand, The Casino Building and Popp Fountain were constructed between 1907 and 1917.

*Bayou Oaks Golf Courses* – The Park boasts three 18-hole golf courses, one of which was once home to the city's PGA tournament. (Not currently open.)

*Bayou Oaks Driving Range* – A 100-tee, double decker driving range.

*Softball and Soccer* – The park more than a dozen softball and soccer fields.

*Stadiums* – Tad Gormley Stadium seats 26,500 and was built by the Works Progress Administration. It was renovated for the 1992 US Olympic Track and Field Trials and in July of 2005, was home to the Jr. Olympics track and field competitions.

Pan American Stadium, a 5,000 seat stadium is the home of many high school footballs games.

*Track* – The 400-meter, international track was designed as a practice track for the 1992 US Olympic Track & Field Trails.

*Tennis* – The City Park Tennis Center is one of the largest municipal tennis facilities in the South.

*Boating and Fishing* – The Park features 11 miles of lagoons, lakes and Bayou's stocked with a wide variety of fish including bass.

*Horse Stables* – Equest Farms offers boarding for horses and equestrian lessons. The park also houses the stables for the Sheriff and his horses.

## **Governance**

- The City of New Orleans owns the land occupied by the park. The park is a non-profit corporation governed by a 36 member board, the New Orleans City Park Improvement Association (CPIA). CPIA is a state agency operating under the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism. The board sets policies consistent with the Park's mission of *Preserving and improving park spaces for recreational, educational, cultural and beautification purposes*.
- Friends of City Park is a separate 501 (c) 3 nonprofit that has its own board and raises money to help support the park.
- The park is also home to the New Orleans Botanical Garden, the only botanical garden in the state of Louisiana. The New Orleans Botanical Garden Foundation, also a 501 (c) 3, raises money to support the Botanical Garden.
- Contributions to any of the above entities are deductible as allowed by law.

## **Financing**

Pre-Katrina.- We believe we are correct when we say that we are ***The most entrepreneurial park in all of Parkdom***. Our pre-Katrina budget was \$10.8 million per year. We received \$200,000 from the state for operations. We received nothing from the city for operations. Both the City and the State have and presumably will continue to support the park periodically with capital funds. We raised the remaining \$10.6 million ourselves via fees for services and fundraising. We were heavily dependent on the sun shining in order to obtain those fees (golf, tennis, the amusement park, catering, weddings, admissions) and needed to raise \$30,000 each day to stay afloat (we have not completely lost our sense of humor!).

Post-Katrina – A lack of revenue forced us to drastically reduce costs and lay off 90 percent of the park's 260 employees. We have raised \$30 million to help restore the park and implement our master plan over the past two years.

The State of Louisiana has recognized the importance of the park and has increased its financial support of the park. Our pre and post-Katrina operating budget appears below:

**Operating Budget**

Fiscal Year	State	Self-Generated	Total	Budgeted Positions
2005	\$ 200,000 2%	\$10,600,000 98%	\$10,800,000	260
July 06-June 07	\$1,200,000 28%	\$3,050,000 72%	\$4,250,000	26
July 07-June 08	\$2,475,000 35%	\$4,552,000 65%	\$7,027,000	63

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Most of the improvements we are looking to implement are being done in accordance with the park’s new master plan - City Park 2018. Adopted in March, 2005 the plan sets out the future of the park with improvements that include renovations and new construction. The plan was created with great citizen input and has been widely acclaimed. It now gives us the opportunity to begin our reconstruction immediately as we have already done the planning. The plan covers improvements to the park over the next 13 years. When adopted, the plan had a price tag of \$115 million. Although hurricane damage will cause the price to increase substantially, the good news is that the plan is in place.

New donations to the park will allow us to properly repair and upgrade from hurricane damage while also implementing portions of the park’s master plan.

In closing, can you imagine New York City without Central Park? Neither can we nor can the residents of Greater New Orleans envision a rebuilt city without part of its soul, City Park, playing a central role. For that reason, New Orleans City Park is rebuilding. It is not an easy task nor will it happen overnight. For those of us entrusted to restore the park, we are humbled every day by the tremendous outpouring of support from throughout the country. We thank you for your support of the park and look forward to returning a crown jewel of the city to our citizens and visitors.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

For further information, please contact John Hopper at (504) 259-1509 or [jhopper@nocp.org](mailto:jhopper@nocp.org) and visit our website: [www.neworleanscitypark.com](http://www.neworleanscitypark.com)