



## Inside Recruitment

July 2007

# Houston Plays Role in Rebuilding New Orleans

Special section reconnects evacuees with their home

By Jennifer Streisand

The Houston (Texas) Chronicle pulled out all the stops for its “Reach, Recruit and Revive New Orleans” spotlight section published July 23, 2006, which was designed to bring back workers and families displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

This is not the first time the newspaper coordinated efforts to help evacuees. In the months following Katrina, the Houston Chronicle worked with evacuees and employers in Houston to match workers with organizations in need of their specific skills, as reported in the February 2006 edition of *Inside Recruitment*.

### The concept forms

The idea to devote a full section to recruiting workers back to New Orleans was conceived by Michelle Stephenson, a sales representative at the Houston Chronicle. Stephenson saw a lot of news coverage about the recovery efforts in New Orleans, but no clear directions for people to obtain employment in the city and move back.

When the “Reach, Recruit and Revive New Orleans” section was published, there were approximately 250,000 evacuees living in Houston.

“The idea just popped into my head. What can we do with employment? All of these people are here; how can we help them get back to New Orleans? If they don’t want to stay here in Houston, how can we help them reconnect?” Stephenson said.

### Marketing the section

Stephenson teamed up with Houston Chronicle account executive Christopher Sanders, an evacuee from New Orleans, and they went to work to market the special section to advertisers in the Gulf Coast region.



CONTINUED

## Inside Recruitment

July 2007

CONTINUED

### Houston Plays Role in Rebuilding New Orleans



Along with about 20 other sales reps, Stephenson and Sanders made phone calls to pitch the section to potential advertisers before making a three-day trip to New Orleans to sell the product door-to-door.

“Once we told them who we were, they were all ears,” noted Sanders about selling the section in person.

“Fifty percent of the ads came from people we had appointments with, and 50% of the ads came from people we didn’t have appointments with who became interested once we talked to them about it.”

Because he was an evacuee from New Orleans, Sanders was able to converse easily with potential advertisers.

“When you can swap war stories, it makes a connection. New Orleans is really one of the last big small towns, and it’s smaller now. The people who are there are really trying to make a concerted effort to bring it back, and everyone is going in the right direction,” he said.

Stephenson and Sanders had appointments with approximately 20 people, but the rest of the accounts were obtained in the door-to-door pitch, making almost 60 sales calls during the three days.

They were motivated by the bigger picture of what the advertising meant, Sanders explained.

“You could have easily walked away from some situations, but we said, ‘Let’s get one more place, let’s get two more places.’ I think the drive was to get as many places as we knew to help folks back in Houston make that connection home.”

The timing for the special section was also ideal because businesses in New Orleans needed workers desperately, he added.

#### Working with the mayor

The “Reach, Recruit and Revive New Orleans” section complemented Mayor Ray Nagin’s initiative to rebuild the city, which began shortly after the devastation of the hurricane in 2005. The mayor appointed a group of civic leaders to develop a plan and make recommendations on how to revive the city.

While the Houston Chronicle’s section was independent of the mayor’s office, Stephenson and Sanders met with representatives of Nagin’s office to obtain the most current information about business and housing conditions in the city, said Lucia G. Bates, recruitment advertising sales manager at the newspaper.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

## Houston Plays Role in Rebuilding New Orleans

### Harrah's involvement

An advertising wrap around the section was sponsored by Harrah's New Orleans Casino & Hotel, which was designed to draw readers to look inside the section, Bates explained.

"So before you even got to the jobs, you saw that piece — full color, very pleasing to the eye. It pops and grabs your attention right away," she said.

Harrah's and other hotels were recruiting their former employees and families back to the Gulf Coast and making rooms available to prospective employees so they would have a place to live, Bates said.

The wrap, which included advertising and incentives from Harrah's, did not appear only in the Sunday section published on July 23, 2006, Sanders noted. After the initial "Reach, Recruit and Revive New Orleans" section, the Harrah's wrap and special section went out again with the regular daily Houston Chronicle for six more weekdays to reach the broadest possible audience.

The wrap and the special jobs section appeared at the top of the daily newspaper so that the targeted audience would not miss it. Harrah's sponsored the wrap for the 60,000 additional copies that were distributed free to readers.

"We delivered 10,000 papers a day for six days, not including Sunday. We delivered on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday of one week, and Monday, Tuesday and Thursday of the following week when we delivered the papers to apartment complexes, churches and workforce centers — places we knew had high concentrations of evacuees," Sanders explained.

### Housing and editorial

Because of the housing shortage in New Orleans, the special section also included real estate advertising, and many of the recruitment ads highlighted housing incentives to return to the city. For example, an ad for Tulane University Hospital & Clinic advertised relocation and sign-on bonuses for full-time employees and "paid housing and transportation to New Orleans."

A prominent component of the special section was articles by the Houston Chronicle's editorial staff, which provided specific information on obtaining affordable housing in New Orleans, Stephenson explained.

An article by Rebecca Maitland, "Harrah's New Orleans has staff openings," noted that Harrah's hired a consultant to help employees find housing and childcare. A story by

CONTINUED

**Inside Recruitment**

July 2007

CONTINUED

**Houston Plays Role  
in Rebuilding New  
Orleans**

Kim Stinebaker looked into recruiting efforts by area hospitals that had reopened since the storm. The recruitment packages by those hospitals offered relocation expenses, housing and significant pay raises.

**Results beyond revenue**

The “Reach, Recruit and Revive New Orleans” special section was a success, generating \$112,000 in new business for the Houston Chronicle, and many accounts have continued advertising in the newspaper, including placing ads on a section of the newspaper’s Web site entitled “Gulf Coast Careers,” Bates said.

The section — found under the jobs link on the Web site — is ongoing, and seeks to advertise positions in a variety of areas, including the oil and gas industries, engineering, and hotels and casinos.

“We have spread it out a little further to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, which is coming alive again and growing,” Sanders noted.

The Houston Chronicle staff anticipates coordinating another print section in summer 2007 to aid in the recovery efforts with updated information and advertising.

“A lot of people were interested last year but didn’t have the funds and just weren’t ready,” Stephenson said.

The Houston Chronicle has produced many such special sections, but this one was viewed more as a national service project rather than a way to generate revenue.

“Initially, when I thought about the idea, it had nothing to do with how much revenue could be made. I was thinking, ‘What if this happened to me?’ Evacuees were just walking around Houston, away from home and lost. The section was an effort to help people reconnect,” Stephenson said.

While Sanders said pitching the section was part of his job, he would have done it for free.

“It was very emotional for me because I felt as though I was out of the recovery process for a city that I knew and loved. This was something that I could do, which is what drove me during the whole process from conception by our team to the publication date,” he concluded.

CONTINUED

## **Inside Recruitment**

July 2007

CONTINUED

# Houston Plays Role in Rebuilding New Orleans

**Lucia G. Bates**  
Houston (Texas) Chronicle  
Phone: 713-362-6820  
E-mail: [lucia.bates@chron.com](mailto:lucia.bates@chron.com)  
Web site: [www.chron.com/jobs](http://www.chron.com/jobs)

**Christopher Sanders**  
Houston (Texas) Chronicle  
Phone: 713-362-7919  
E-mail: [christopher.sanders@chron.com](mailto:christopher.sanders@chron.com)  
Web site: [www.chron.com](http://www.chron.com)

**Michelle Stephenson**  
Houston (Texas) Chronicle  
Phone: 713-362-3387  
E-mail: [michelle.stephenson@chron.com](mailto:michelle.stephenson@chron.com)  
Web site: [www.chron.com](http://www.chron.com)

