

**An Open Letter
To the Citizens of St. Tammany Fire District No. 1
From Larry Hess, Fire Chief St. Tammany Fire District No. 1**

I would like to assure all of the citizens of our fire protection district that your fire department continues to provide services for your safety at the highest level. During Hurricane Katrina the 140 members of St. Tammany Fire Protection District No. 1 performed their duties in a courageous, quiet, professional manner that reflected the most noble traditions of America's Fire Service. I am incapable of articulating the profound pride and respect I have for the women and men of your fire department as I evaluate their actions during the worst natural disaster in our country's history.

Prior to the storm we implemented predetermined measures identified in our Hurricane Plan to relocate portions of our manpower and equipment, so we were in a position to respond to what we projected as an exceptionally high number of requests for services. These pre-storm protective actions proved to be invaluable as we brought those assets back from their remote staging areas to join with the manpower and equipment that we maintained within the district during the height of the hurricane.

Firefighters were deployed into our wounded neighborhoods even as the storm continued to begin assessing passable routes of travel so we could effectively respond to emergency calls and using chain saws to clear those routes that were blocked. Requests for emergency services caused by the widespread devastation began immediately and continued literally non-stop for three weeks. Members of Fire District No. 1 and the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office began intense search and rescue efforts throughout the impacted area. The Fire Department also worked with the Slidell Police Department during search and rescue operations conducted within the City of Slidell. These missions commenced immediately as conditions allowed responders to be placed safely on the streets.

In all, firefighters assisted in the moving of more than 2,800 people to safety. Approximately 250 of those were in immediate peril. During search and rescue missions with the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office, South Carolina Search and Rescue Task Force 1, Alabama Search and Rescue Task Force, your firefighters conducted door-to-door searches of over 25,000 homes and businesses in only nine days. To describe this as a Herculean effort is a gross understatement.

During the first 20 days following the storm Fire District No. 1 members responded to 30 significant fires. They were aided in this superhuman effort by 50 firefighters from Illinois Strike Force 6 in the greater Chicago area and Howard Township Fire Department in southwest Michigan. We will be forever indebted to them and their communities for their assistance.

This commitment to providing for the public safety was realized while 70% of the firefighters had sustained significant damage to their homes or like so many others suffered a total loss of everything they owned. As was the case with many others they had no communication with their loved ones for a week or more following the hurricane. Their focus during and following this event was on the public safety.

The Winn-Dixie store on Robert Boulevard and Brownsitch Road, the Church of Latter Day Saints on Robert Boulevard, the Shell gasoline station on Brownsitch Road, Sam's on Airport Road, Academy Sporting Goods on Airport Road and Slidell Memorial Hospital were crucial in assisting the fire department during this extended emergency situation. These and other organizations and numerous individuals assisted us in feeding, clothing and fueling emergency responders and equipment.

In a format such as this it is impossible to convey an accurate or complete picture of the selflessness and dedication exhibited by the members of St. Tammany Fire Protection District No. 1. It is also important to note that they were part of a greater effort that included St. Tammany Parish Government, the Mayor's Office of Slidell, the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office, the Slidell Police Department, and Lifeguard and Acadian Ambulance Companies.

We also owe a special thanks to Parish President Kevin Davis, Slidell Mayor Ben Morris, Slidell Police Chief Freddy Drennan and, of course, St. Tammany Parish Sheriff Jack Strain and the members of the Sheriff's Search and Rescue Division. Their tireless efforts aided our fire department in the procurement of equipment and expertise that resulted in this successful emergency operation.

I will close this letter by thanking our fine fire department and the people of this fire protection district who have supported us before, during and after Hurricane Katrina. As our community will rebuild and prosper, the fire department will rebuild its four heavily damaged stations, replace its destroyed equipment, move on from its personal losses and prosper as well. It is what we do.

We are looking forward to taking a leadership role in the revitalization of our community.

Thank you,

**Larry Hess
Fire Chief
St. Tammany Fire Protection District No. 1
26 September 2005**