## The Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans

A community rediscovered; a city revitalized

# Strategic Plan for Rebuilding and Renewal 2007-2012



May, 2008 Iyar, 5768

#### **Executive Summary**

#### 1. Introduction

The impact of Katrina on the entire Gulf Coast was unprecedented. In the wake of the storm, both the general and Jewish population of New Orleans had declined, resulting in a smaller community with greater needs. Where the formal city, state and federal leadership in leading the recovery was sorely lacking, leaders in the faith and neighborhood communities rose bravely to the challenge of recovery and rebuilding. The Jewish community was no exception. Despite the devastation, positive outgrowths of the storm were recognition of the uniqueness and fortitude of the New Orleans Jewish community and appreciation for its deep history.

While developing a strategic plan normally occurs as part of an organization's on-going management processes, the crisis of Katrina and the importance of creating a framework to guide the rebuilding and recovery process made strategic planning for the Jewish community imperative. In fulfilling its traditional role in the community, the Jewish Federation took the lead in establishing a Recovery Task Force which was tasked with developing a strategic plan to guide the Jewish community for the next five to ten years.

#### 2. The Context

Katrina impacted everyone who called New Orleans home. Two years after Hurricane Katrina the latest population estimate places the city at two thirds of its pre-storm census. According to Federation statistics, there has been a decline from approximately 3,119 Jewish households, representing 9,500 individuals, to 6,600 Jews in the Greater New Orleans area. Approximately 80 percent of the Jews in the area sustained storm-related damage to their homes.

The two neighborhoods that suffered the most damage during Hurricane Katrina were the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward and Lakeview. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the Lakeview neighborhood was one of the most densely Jewish populated neighborhoods in the metropolitan area. The New Orleans Jewish infrastructure prior to the storm was able to support a community of 12-15,000. The Jewish Community Center in Uptown, which was one of the first centers that featured fitness facilities to reopen after the storm, has seen an increase in membership although the proportion of members who are Jewish is less than it was prior to the storm. The New Orleans Jewish Day School, which boasted of its largest enrollment prior to the hurricane, has since closed its middle school and has combined its the elementary school grades. The Beth Israel Synagogue, a prominent central Jewish meeting center in the Lakeview neighborhood, was devastated; the community has lost roughly one third of its donor base and one third of the professional leadership and staff from Jewish service agencies. While the influx of new leadership has resulted in new energy and often new perspectives, there has been a loss of institutional knowledge.

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The Federation with the help of United Jewish Communities was able to provide financial and emotional support during the crucial months after the storm. The midterm recovery process which has taken place for the last year is preceding well. Most

families are back, the leadership of the institutions and organizations is stable; the religious leaders have found their congregations to be smaller but more actively engaged in temple activity.

#### 3. The Opportunity

While Katrina was a crisis it also offered the Jewish community a unique opportunity for reflection and creating a unified vision of its hopes for the future. The Greater New Orleans Jewish community is smaller post-Katrina but it is more engaged and passionate about the city and the local Jewish community. As is often the case when things which were taken for granted are threatened, there is a greater appreciation and engagement in those activities, institutions and organization which made the Jewish community unique and strong. New Jewish families are moving into the city and there is an organized approach to integrate them into the Jewish cultural life of New Orleans. Despite the unprecedented nature of the depth of destruction from Katrina, what has emerged for New Orleans Jews is a community appreciative of its past and highly committed to its future.

Although the Jewish community was greatly decreased in size in the wake of the storm, those who returned quickly realized that the recovery effort had created a strong sense of community involvement and commitment to see the city grow and improve While most Federations tend to be inward looking, the situation called for a broader focus for the New Orleans Federation to assess, communicate and lead within the New Orleans community as well as be outwardly focused to the rest of the nation to forge a message to aid in the recovery and strengthening of the city.

In the Spring of 2006 it was decided by the Federation that a strategic effort was needed to help guide the Jewish community's rebuilding process. With the leadership of the Jewish Federation over 150 individuals met over a twelve-month period to articulate goals, review data, and develop initiatives and recommendations to move the community forward. In addition over 120 community members participated in a day-long planning session held in March of 2007. Given the urgency of the situation many of the recommendations were quickly implemented to aid in the recovery and rejuvenation of the city. The ultimate goal of the Recovery Task Force was to help articulate a vision and clear strategy to propel New Orleans to a new and better place over the next five to ten years.

#### 4. The Vision

To transform the New Orleans Jewish community into the most successful, vibrant and rich intermediate Jewish community in North America—attractive to young Jewish families

#### 5. The Process

Five task forces (Population, Geography, Fund-Raising, Agencies and Public Relations) with fifteen to twenty members each representing boards and staff of all Jewish

synagogues organizations and agencies were established to review information and develop recommendations to move the Jewish community forward.

Each of the five Task Forces approached its assignment of developing recommendations by completing ten steps; 1) Assessing the environment, 2) Identifying critical issues, 3) Building scenarios, 4) Creating a realistic vision, 5) Setting objectives, 6) Collecting data, 7) Looking to other communities, 8) Discussing obstacles and problems, 9) Generating strategies, and 10) Developing proposals and recommendations. The Jewish Federation's website was used as a mechanism to keep the community informed of the work of the Task Forces by posting meeting summaries and initial recommendations.

#### 6. Twelve Strategic Thrusts

As the Task Forces conducted their analysis, many of the issues raised transcended the specific focus of one specific the group and twelve major themes emerged. These themes and resulting recommendations focus on those elements which are under the Jewish community's scope of influence. The Strategic Thrusts underscore the inter-related nature of the recommendations as well as the process of rebuilding and re-energizing New Orleans's Jewish community.

- ⇒ Rebuilding the population is the first priority and attracting newcomers, be they young adults, students, young families or retirees, is of vital importance to the New Orleans Jewish community. Based on estimates the Jewish population has declined from 9,500 to 6,600 since Katrina. In order to grow the community and maintain its vitality, welcoming newcomers, supporting businesses and encouraging Jewish students to put down roots in the community must become a priority.
- ⇒ While the community rebuilds it is important to embrace those who have *left.* Those who have relocated to new communities have deep histories in New Orleans; as lay leaders, generous donors, and active community participants, they represent a key link to our past.
- ⇒ Strengthening the community requires an aggressive effort to retain its human assets by nurturing and strengthening support systems. Rebuilding the population will require supporting those who are currently living here. Support systems either to deal with trauma or to find employment, honest and skilled contractors or volunteer opportunities becomes more than optional niceties but necessary components of the recovery process.
- ⇒ The Jewish community is comprised of unique neighborhoods, each with its distinct identity and set of needs. The goal should be to bring the community together as one while supporting and respecting the unique neighborhoods. A conscious effort must be made to strike a balance between bringing the community together as one and supporting and respecting the unique neighborhood needs and culture of the Northshore, Metairie, Lakeview and Uptown.

- ⇒ Our smaller numbers make high levels of engagement and involvement in the Jewish institutions of unparalleled importance. The community no longer has the luxury to have a small percentage of its members carry the weight of lay leadership. Both as a means to keep the institutions strong and to be reflective of the community which they serve, efforts must be made to offer opportunities to everyone for meaningful participation in Jewish community life.
- ⇒ In order to achieve our vision, we must embrace collaborative approaches to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the community. The recovery effort saw an unprecedented level of collaboration between and among the community's synagogues, agencies and organizations. With a smaller population and revenue base yet greater needs it becomes imperative that all institutions of the community look to collaborative approaches to effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the community.
- ⇒ *Jewish education is a vital component of the community.* Education is central to Jewish culture and identity. In order to attract new families and maintain a vibrant community it is imperative that there is strong Jewish day school education and opportunities for a thorough Jewish education for children as well as adults.
- ⇒ An aggressive public relations campaign within the New Orleans, national and international community is integral to the community's recovery. There is a riveting story to tell and the community cannot leave it to mainstream media to get the story out. The negative image of the city which deters visitors and potential residents has to be countered by the many stories of renewal, selflessness and hope in the community. Conversely the community cannot let the rest of the world forget about the needs and struggles of New Orleans.
- ⇒ Frequent and factual communication which makes the most of modern technology is central to the community's recovery. Having an internet presence displaying all pertinent information about Jewish life will play a large role in the recovery. Using a variety of communication strategies to inform the community about events, issues and decisions being discussed creates a more vibrant and engaged constituency.
- ⇒ To meet the many needs of the Jewish community, funding support must be increased, starting with expanding local fund-raising opportunities. The tendency to rely on traditional donors must be replaced with more aggressive and creative approaches. A renewed effort to engage local businesses in financial support must be undertaken as well as new collaborative approaches to raise local dollars.
- ⇒ The depth of financial support required necessitates a new focus on external fund-raising approaches. There is a unique and time-limited opportunity to increase the base of financial support for the New Orleans community. There is a basic need to complement local giving with funding from the outside in view of the enormous needs. However, the window of opportunity to capitalize on an national awareness of the impact of Katrina will soon fade and fund-raising

- efforts must be started quickly so as not to lose the public interest and support for the city.
- ⇒ New Orleans can be a Jewish people project and a disaster recovery model. There is a wealth of opportunity to improve the community, and by embracing a strategic approach to guide the recovery process, New Orleans can be an example for the world. It will be important to maintain the open-mindedness, inclusivity and cooperation which characterized the recovery process as the community moves into the implementation phase.

#### 7. Recovery Plan Recommendations and Budget Plan

a. Rebuilding the population is the first priority and attracting newcomers, be they young adults, students, young families or retirees is of vital importance to the New Orleans Jewish community

The four part approach to rebuilding the population includes a full time Newcomers' Coordinator position responsible for the administration, publicizing and evaluating a financial incentive package and coordinating volunteers to adopt new arrivals and host formal welcoming parties; a close partnership with Hillel for educational, religious, cultural and mentoring programs aimed at graduate and undergraduates; and the creation and staffing of a Jewish Business Council and hosting Weekend missions which expose outsiders to the New Orleans.

Annual Coast of Initiatives

Newcomer Programs= \$840,000 Retaining Students =\$500,000

> 1 Year Cost = \$ 1,340,000 5 Year Cost = \$12,200,000\*

> > \*includes \$6,250,000 in capital projects

b. Strengthening the community requires an aggressive effort to retain its human assets by nurturing and strengthening support systems.

In addition to providing counseling and support services for those in need, the recommendations address a coordinated effort to reach out to interfaith families, and couples as well as partnering with the wider community and those who have relocated from New Orleans.

**Annual Coast of Initiatives** 

Services for the Elderly= \$242,500 Services for Children =\$226,000 Services for Adults =\$185,500

> 1 Year Cost = \$ 654,000 5 Year Cost = \$3,270,000

c. The Jewish community is comprised of unique neighborhoods, each with its distinct identity and set of needs. The goal should be to bring the community together as one while supporting and respecting the unique neighborhoods.

While community-wide celebrations and events should be hosted in different locations throughout the area, and new funding initiatives should aim to build the community as a whole, attention must be paid to restoring those facilities which served as anchors of the Jewish community in specific neighborhoods.

#### Annual Cost of Initiatives

Rebuilding/Restoring Infrastructure= \$125,000 Community Wide Programming =\$44,200 Capital Projects = \$3,700,000

> 1 Year Cost = \$ 206,700 5 Year Cost = \$ 766,000

### d. Our smaller numbers make high levels of engagement and involvement in the Jewish institutions of unparalleled importance.

Through synagogue specific activities and support of the growth of a strong Modern Orthodox community, to aggressive outreach to those currently uninvolved or disconnected from the Jewish community, providing meaningful opportunities for participation in Jewish life is integral to recovery and rebuilding efforts. Collaboration does not cost the community a dime but by supporting the Rabbinic council's recommendation for a shared community mikveh, creating a community wide adult education committee, requesting the JCC to develop collaborative networks for community cultural events and youth activities will result in a stronger more efficient service delivery system

#### Annual Coast of Initiatives

Synagogue Redevelopment = \$350,000 Synagogue/Agency Programming =\$174,400 Jewish Web Portal =\$20,000

> 1 Year Cost= \$ 584,400 5 Year Cost= \$2,922,000

#### e. Jewish education is a vital component of the community.

Jewish education is a life long process and the community must be providing opportunities for study at the pre-school, youth and adult level. The Jewish Day School's creation of clear enrollment and operational benchmarks and the coordinated development of a supplemental education plan will provide a solid basis for life long learning.

Annual Coast of Initiatives
Jewish Day School Education= \$442,000
Adult Education = \$66,000
Religious Education = \$260,000

1 Year Cost = \$ 768,000 5 Year Cost = \$4,165,000

f. An aggressive public relations campaign, and resource development within the New Orleans, national and international community is integral to the community's recovery.

The community can no longer be complacent in its fund-raising strategies, the role of local businesses and corporate giving must be increased, contact with donors who have relocated must be maintained, a community grant writer should identify support opportunities and a community fundraising event will be held.

Through the pro bono work of a public relations firm engaged by the Federation and the use of electronic, print and visual media, the national and international audiences will hear New Orleans' compelling story and have ready access to the resources of the Jewish community.

**Annual Coast of Initiatives** 

Federation Resource Development = \$260,000

1 Year Cost = \$260,000 5 Year Cost = \$860,000

Budget/Recommendation	Projected 1 Year Total	Projected 5 Year Total
Area		
Attract and Retain People	\$1,340,000	\$12,200,000
Nurturing Human Assets	\$654,000	\$3,270,000
Strengthening Community	\$206,700	\$766,000
Community Engagement	\$584,400	\$2,922,000
Education	\$768,000	\$4,165,000
Public Relations and Fund- Raising	\$260,000	\$860,000
Total	\$3,813,100	\$24,183,000*

\*includes \$6,250,000 in capital projects

Many of these recommendations have already been implemented, including activities targeted to newcomers and planning for a community wide fund-raising campaign already in the works. The implementation of these recommendations will be overseen by an Implementation Cabinet and four standing committees of the Federation Board.

#### 8. Conclusion

While the devastation caused by Katrina was tremendous the Jewish community has emerged smaller yet stronger, more resilient and optimistic. The level of engagement and commitment to realizing the vision for the community has never been higher in the New Orleans community. Much of the progress to date has been a direct result of the help received from UJC and the passionate commitment to the city on the part of its lay and professional leadership. Despite the gains made to date it is important to realize that the road to long term renewal and recovery is long and requires a marathon's approach to endurance. The need for on-going support from both internal and external sources will be a reality for New Orleans for a long time into the future. However, the goals sustained to date have created a more unified, forward thinking and outward looking community better poised to create a sustain a model American Jewish community in New Orleans.