

New Orleans: Devastation widespread, but local optimism stays strong

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5,000 garbage bags of supplies to Algiers, a New Orleans suburb. She biked around, delivering supplies.

"There were people there from all over the United States and Canada," she said. "It was amazing to see all these people who had just dropped their lives and everything to come and help."

Using fake press credentials to return to the city a few weeks after Katrina passed, Hasuly began helping others with food and supplies.

"We all wanted to come back and help," she said. "We feel like we can't exist anywhere else."

Farther down the street, Mary Poatt is raking up the remainder of the oak tree that fell in front of her house.

"All these oak trees were here," Poatt said, pointing to her front yard. "You couldn't get in my house."

She arrived in New Orleans Saturday. She lost half of her roof and, consequently, her second story to Katrina, but she said she will definitely stay in the much-loved city.

"There's no other place like New Or-

leans," she said. "People go bad-mouthing it, but they've never lived here. They don't know the community ... everybody knows each other."

Poatt has only been back a few days, but she's already seeing progress.

"Last week, this (street) was horrible, but it's all been cleaned up," she said, gesturing toward a block strewn with scant traces of debris.

A U.S. Army Humvee rolls by, followed by a telephone utility truck. Poatt smiles.

"I'm pretty impressed with what the city's doing — well, trying to do. Let's put it that way," she said.

It's nearly impossible to walk down the sidewalks; huge piles of furniture and personal belongings sit every few feet. A headstone inexplicably sits in a front yard on Broadway Avenue.

In the house next door, Irma Stiegler is preparing her lunch, a Meal Ready to Eat, from the military. Stiegler has lived in her house since she was 2 and lost her basement to the flood.

"My basement was loaded with all my memorabilia, because I had so many things from other people that I

was trying to store and distribute to all the right places," she said.

She gestured to a dilapidated piano sitting on the median. Her most painful loss, it was her grandmother's piano from 1867. She saved the ornate top and brass handles before the piano was dragged out.

Kelly Terrace is tending bar at The Boot, a popular college bar, despite the fact that there's only one customer. The Boot re-opened three weeks ago, and Terrace said that the crowd has been smaller but generous with tips.

The Boot had about two feet of water outside — a widely circulated photo showed a man canoeing by — but is slightly raised off the street, leaving about eight inches of water inside.

Beyond The Boot, huge yellow tubes snaking into the windows of Tulane University's buildings are clearly visible. Giant blue dehumidifiers are helping dry out the buildings, some of which had two feet of standing water.

No Tulane University officials will comment on the school's status, but it's been widely reported that Tulane will open for the spring semester.

Rodney Owsley, a splice worker for BellSouth from Missouri working on a switchboard at the edge of Tulane's campus, said that the job facing utility crews is enormous.

"I've worked ice storms, but never nothing as widespread as this ... they're going to have to re-engineer their whole infrastructure," he said.

The relatively unscathed campus of Loyola University New Orleans has become a makeshift Army base. Humvees fill the parking lots, and an armed guard checks credentials.

A student union ballroom is filled with hundreds of cots, and signs proclaiming that breakfast will be served only from 7 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. litter the campus. In front of the Smoothie King, a triage unit and aid supplies have replaced café tables. The library has become the base of operations.

At the Bulldog, a popular pub on Magazine Street, business is booming. Because the street is so close to the river, and therefore on higher ground, there was no standing water and relatively little damage.

Patrons fill the interior and spill out

onto the streets. They don't seem to be bothered by the limited selection of food and alcohol.

Not everyone is so cheerful. Maria Esperanza Fingerman has just returned home to find her downstairs covered in mold.

"It's so hard to see everything so destroyed," she said. She points to art on the walls and a grandfather clock, all warped and stained in brown, gray and green circular blooms of mold.

She and her husband fled to Pensacola, Fla., where they stayed in their car in a parking lot under condos. On the second day, a man from New Orleans invited them into his condo.

"He was our angel," Fingerman said.

This is her first day back in New Orleans and she is overwhelmed, but she keeps her faith.

"God is going to help us, one or the other way, and I always believe that," she says. "He's going to give us a lot of courage."

Contact the higher education reporter at kbrown@dailyemerald.com

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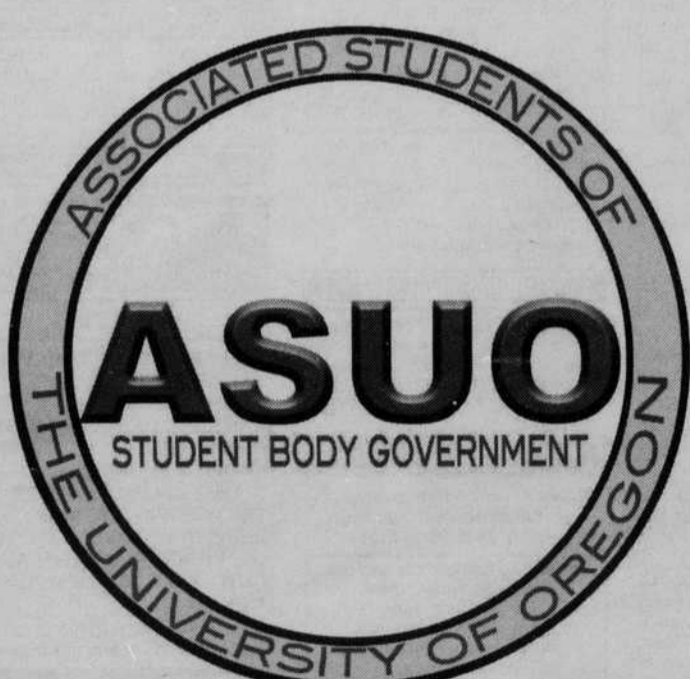
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Walker: Candidate seeks to improve health care

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campaign, a position for which Vicki Walker saw no one more qualified.

"When I was thinking of running for governor, there wasn't a thought in my mind of anyone ruining my campaign besides my daughter," she said.

Sara Walker, a University graduate, has worked on her mother's campaigns and since she was young. Her mother used to pay her and her older brother, Adam, to distribute brochures door-to-door when they were younger, and Sara Walker volunteered in the office on Vicki Walker's first legislative session in 1999.

Sara Walker was still thinking of working as a pilot when she interned for her mother in 2001.

"I had no interest in politics when I started interning for her," Sara Walker said. "It was just work study so I could get some credit."

The pair had had some problems when Sara Walker was younger, typical teenage mother-daughter drama, they both admit.

"There were times she wasn't around a lot," Sara Walker said. "It wasn't until I started working for her that I found out why — that she was doing important things."

Since Sara Walker returned to Eugene from her Las Vegas home to run the campaign, the two have changed their relationship to fit a work setting.

"We've had to adjust from mother-daughter to employer-employee," Vicki Walker said. But a daughter has some advantages as a campaign manager, she said.

"She doesn't hesitate to tell me what she thinks," Vicki Walker said. "Sometimes campaign managers aren't willing to be that blunt and honest."

Growing up poor, Vicki Walker tells of having to put cardboard in her shoes and take out a loan in high school to go to the dentist, which she said took three years to pay off.

"I was tired of not smiling with my mouth open," Vicki Walker said.

The experience stuck with her, and as a legislator she pushed to include

dental in the Oregon Health Plan.

Vicki Walker was also a victim of sexual abuse as a child and tried to commit suicide as teenager, she said. It wasn't until a high school teacher persuaded her that she could go to college that she turned her life around.

But she hasn't hidden her troubles; she has spoken on the floor of the Oregon Legislature about being raped as a child by a neighbor. Sharing her experiences can force people to confront important issues such as child abuse, she said.

"Those were important issues to talk about," Vicki Walker said.

Vicki Walker's experience with abuse has fueled her political fire.

"It's an abuse of power," she said of child abuse. "I've never been one to support the abuse of power."

Colleagues say Vicki Walker has a reputation for her attention to detail and extensive research.

State Sen. Bill Morrisette, D-Springfield, remembers his first meeting with her. She was working as a candidate's campaign manager and quit because the candidate wasn't following campaign guidelines.

"That's typical of her," Morrisette said. "She's a fanatic for details."

But even with her careful preparation, she knows how to take action immediately, Morrisette said.

"She doesn't wait; she gets involved at the beginning," Morrisette said. "If she sees something that needs fixing, she will do the background, initiate it and get it fixed."

Morrisette is still supporting Gov. Ted Kulongoski, but he said he believes Vicki Walker would be a qualified governor.

"You've got to have some visibility and some knowledge of the (legislative) process," Morrisette said. "She has an extremely good understanding of the process."

Vicki Walker has been an outspoken critic of Kulongoski, her most visible battle being over the State Accident Insurance Fund (SAIF). She sees the current government as a network of

"Good Ol' Boys," politicians who reward friends and contributors with appointments and government perks while shutting out regular Oregonians.

"That's what turns people off of government and makes them cynical," Vicki Walker said. She believes that the governor has the ability to change that.

"The governor has a unique opportunity for leadership," she said.

She looks at her candidacy as a way of rejuvenating Oregonians who feel left out of politics, in the same way she was energized as a child by John F. Kennedy.

Walker sees many problems in Oregon that Kulongoski has not fixed, including education funding, health care and taxation.

During the legislative session this summer, some called Kulongoski "Waldo," as in "Where's Waldo?" for his lack of attendance, she said.

Walker pushed through 59 of the 139 bills she introduced this summer, in a split Oregon Legislature. That's a sign that as governor, she can bring together both Democrats and Republicans, Walker said.

"It's all about creating, building and maintaining relationships," Walker said. "It's recognizing that we're Oregonians first and whatever political party you identify with second."

Despite her ability to compromise, Walker says she still has core values — such as being in favor of abortion rights and protecting the environment — that she won't change.

Some Democrats are worried that her run for governor could jeopardize her Senate seat, possibly giving it to former Eugene Mayor Jim Torrey, who is running for the seat as a Republican. But she says she's not worried.

"There's a lot of reassuring people about the candidacy," Vicki Walker said. "If we do lose (the Senate seat), it's better off to have a governor who can do the job."

Contact the city and state politics reporter at chagan@dailyemerald.com

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