

## *Gulf Shipper*

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### **8 Months and Counting...**

Since Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast over eight months ago, we see many signs of progress, but also vast amounts of inaction and ineptitude. A simple comparison illustrates this point. Traveling to the Mississippi Gulf Coast one sees absolute devastation as if from a nuclear strike, with no discernible landmarks and many areas wiped clean down to the foundations. But at the same time the coast is a beehive of activity with construction cranes all over the landscape. Port traffic in Gulfport has begun to recover with Dole, Crowley and Chiquita resuming their regular weekly Central America calls.

Contrast this with New Orleans where, depending upon whose figures you believe, we are supposedly up to 100% of pre-Katrina shipping activity. That's a little difficult to fathom when Maersk's terminal at the junction of the Industrial Canal and the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) was obliterated, losing for the port a Central American, South American and Mexican Yucatan weekly service. Although it is true that Maersk still provides a barge feeder service from Houston, two of the main cargo liftings from Central America, perishables and wearing apparel, cannot deal with transit times of up to two weeks. Both of these commodities are time sensitive, the former, for obvious reasons, the latter due to supply chain "just in time" considerations that the trade has come to expect as "normal."

Cleanup and rebuilding of the city itself seems to have become a finger-pointing exercise about who is qualified to carry out which contract to remove flooded cars that have for the past eight months lain on the streets, floated in canals or have been tossed into trees and on rooftops. Nature seems to be doing a better job of recovering than our alleged local political leaders. When I returned from Memphis in early October to my New Orleans East house (which had been marinating for weeks in five feet of lake water,) it looked indeed as if we were the victims of a nuclear strike. It was strange to see dead vegetation everywhere, not a hint of green, to hear the chirping of no insects, to see no birds in flight or nesting in the trees or any other form of non human life. But the birds and bugs have now come back (mosquitoes with a vengeance,) and after having pumped Lake Ponchartrain's waters out of my pool, cleaned and refilled it, I saw two Mallard ducks, interrupting their spring migration, to touch down on my pool deck. They were looking at the water with covetous eyes, all the adjoining pools in the neighborhood filled with a nasty primordial "soup." I even saw my first armadillo of the post-Katrina era early one recent morning, caught in my headlight beams. I don't know if he was an "illegal immigrant" to the area or found a way to climb a tree during the flood with his little paws and heavy body.

We seem to be stuck in a continual cycle of despair, especially when CNN reruns video of a flooded New Orleans. Even months after the storm we get the strangest responses from otherwise intelligent people. Case in point: we had a recent LTL truck shipment to move from Houston to New Orleans, but the Roadway dispatcher noted that he could not accommodate us as corporate in Akron advised him that New Orleans was "under water." The Port of New Orleans fights an uphill battle on an almost daily basis whenever TV networks do "retrospectives" of Katrina, our citizens photogenically dangling out of the hatches of Coast Guard rescue helicopters. Thus, despite current budgetary constraints, the Port is obligated to attend every available trade function domestically and world wide to counter this impression.

Our local brokers association (IFFCBANO) has taken a step in this direction by hosting its 28th annual conference June 1-4 in New Orleans at the Royal Sonesta Hotel with the theme "Celebrating the Rebirth of Transportation in the Gulf South." Seeing as how ports in Louisiana and the Gulf Coast could act as powerful engines of economic development, we have focused our entire conference on this prime goal. Our National association, NCBFAA is proposing amendments to the Customs Regulations which would take into account future natural or manmade disasters where a port is closed and brokers have to relocate operations, obtaining a waiver of onerous District permitting processes, thereby allowing temporary operations.

Certainly, the rest of the world moves forward and we still look at issues on a national basis that could seriously effect business development and trade in the Gulf South: Congress' security bill post the Dubai Ports debacle, with the "crazies" calling for 100% container screening at ports of loading; more data elements about a shipment before loading to the U.S., threatening the future of our industry; and new enhancements to C-TPAT that portend an Orwellian nightmare.