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Non-profit Launches TV Series to Tell Volunteer Stories of Post-Katrina Recovery

On August 29, 2007, TravelTelevision.org, a Montgomery County, Maryland-based nonprofit corporation will commemorate the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina with the launch of a television series and a website, ProjectKatrinaVolunteers.net. The television series, which will air on the Dish Network and public access channels around the country will share the stories of volunteers who have devoted so much time and strength to rebuilding the disaster region. The website will provide a unique forum in which volunteers can share their stories and encourage others to spend time rebuilding the Gulf Coast region through discussions, videos and photographs, and blogs written by volunteers.

After the sirens were quiet, and the insurance adjusters and news crews left the area, the devastation remained throughout the city of New Orleans and vicinity. Many people across the United States asked themselves what they could do to help, and the answer came in the way of a decision to volunteer their vacation time and provide hands-on help wherever and however they were needed. This patchwork quilt of individuals and organizations has no central location or vehicle for debriefing, planning, and sharing their stories. Despite the lack of one centralized organization, groups, such as Habitat for Humanity, Common Ground, and KaBoom, have successfully drawn 600,000 volunteers to the Gulf Coast in the last two years. However, volunteer efforts are diminishing, but the need has not; volunteers will be needed to help rebuild for at least another decade. The goal of TravelTelevision.org's website and television series is to use the stories of those who have volunteered to encourage others to plan their vacations accordingly.

"We thought that there would be a need to discuss the experiences volunteers had in the Gulf Coast," explained project director Steve Friedman, "but we did not expect the range of emotion and passion that volunteers brought back from their trips." Sensing their wish to describe their experiences and call upon their fellow citizens to volunteer similarly, the website and television program were designed to meet the needs and objectives of the former and continuing volunteers, who have ranged from private citizens, faith and school groups, international tourists, and corporate officers. "The loudest message we've heard from the returning volunteers is that there is room for everyone, and everyone is welcome."