

Legislative Update

for State Historic Preservation Officers



PRESERVATION LEGISLATION

H.R. 1043/S.584

Community Restoration and Revitalization Act

For a list of co-sponsors, go to:

www.preservationaction.org/07lobbying/tax.htm

HPF APPROPRIATIONS

Continuing Resolution in effect until November 16.

To access legislative information including bill text, summary, and status, go to THOMAS at: <http://thomas.loc.gov>

HISTORIC PRESERVATION CAUCUS

For a list of members, go to: www.preservationaction.org/caucus/caucus07.htm

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How it's Going in the Go Zone? Mississippi's Gulf Coast

Chelius Carter leads many tours showing preservationists around the numerous sites along the Gulf that have benefited from a onetime \$26,000,000 increase to the Historic Preservation Fund to support rebuilding in Mississippi. On this particular tour, Chelius, Director of the Biloxi Field Office of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) was accompanied by his staff Trevor Brown and Jeffrey Rosenberg, as well as Ed Ellington, a documentary film maker.

A Preserve America grant conceived to study "Rebuilding the Gulf Coast's Heritage Tourism Industry" is now funding Ed's film project. The effort will capture some of the many stories generated by the disaster and the community's response. The film wasn't a part of the original grant proposal, but as the MDAH began their restoration efforts, and the implementation of the Preserve America grant, it became clear that the work being done to "salvage" the Gulf Coast's heritage was an interesting story in and of itself.

According to Deputy Historic Preservation Officer Ken P'Pool, "there are many efforts being made by various groups on the Coast to piece back together the remains of their cultural heritage (archival, artistic, ethnic, foods, etc.) We felt that a film documenting the challenges and the progress being made in recovering from some so much damage to the cultural fabric might be one of the best ways to get the message across to the public (hopefully a national audience) that not everything was lost to Katrina."

What happened in the Gulf two and a half years ago doesn't make the front page in most newspapers printed outside of the "Gulf Opportunity Zone" -- that is, the area of the Gulf devastated by the impact of the 2005 hurricanes. Within the region, however, Katrina has been incorporated into a collective personal story. Events are "pre-K" or "post-K". Life before the storm is hard for many to remember exactly given the extraordinary change in daily life cause by massive destruction. Over the course of the day, Chelius and Ed talked about a lot of things, but thoughts kept coming back to large scale trauma and how everyone is coping. Chelius made connections between the rebuilding effort and what happened in many European cities immediately after World War II. Apt, given many areas of the Gulf still look bombed. This landscape belies a strong sense of hope (and necessary humor) among the Gulf's residents.

How \$26,000,000 Was Spent

The tour began in Waveland, Mississippi, which was Katrina's ground zero. Chris Steiner, recipient of an up-to-\$110,000 HPF grant from the MDAH evacuated from his home to his family's Waveland place when the news of the storm sent thousands out of the area. The water rose so high and fast that Chris was forced to climb out of a window. A ten foot wall of water dislodged the building from its foundation and moved it several feet. Chris spent some time hanging onto the building's eave. Two and a half years later, his attitude is positive, and repairs are well underway.

Chris's happier ending comes thanks to support from the MDAH who received \$26,000,000 to pass through to property owners in need. To comply with grant rules, vinyl siding was removed in many cases. Chris's house was one such case -- he paid for the siding.

When business owner Shawn Montella first saw his Long Beach coffee shop pummeled by surge and wind damage and debris impact, his heart dropped. The effort to bring the stunning classical revival gem back to life after the storm was monumental, but worth it. "At the time, I wished it would go away, but after about a month or so, I was so glad we had it." The coffee shop was an oasis -- and still is. Business is slow, but the area is improving. The project received \$150,000 which will serve to designate the property as a "Mississippi Landmark" and involve an easement in perpetuity.

The group spoke with Shawn outside his shop as he dealt with a makeshift water main, about twice the circumference of a garden hose. People kept driving over her water supply, sometimes disconnecting the main. Shawn simply fixed it.

Curator Richard Flowers led the group of us through Beauvoir, Jefferson Davis's home. The building was nearly destroyed by the storm, but concerted effort among a number of Mississippi groups is now paying off and the place is looking better than ever, and full of life. Flowers explained the series of "reveals" throughout the house's interior as a century's worth of retouching was carefully removed from artfully painted plaster. The MDAH provided \$1,000,000 for this project that was mostly funded by FEMA. The site received a Save America's Treasures grant before the storm. Once completed, the historic site's craftsmanship will be spotlighted in a labor-oriented interpretative program.

The tour covered miles and miles of coastline and snaked around in neighborhoods in one town after another. Visits were made to a number of houses "in progress," some that still looked like shells but will be saved, but in almost all cases (Beauvoir was an exception) most projects supported by the MDAH's supplemental funding helped low-to-moderate income residents fix modest houses. The ongoing challenge of recovery has helped strengthen relationships between preservation-oriented and like-minded groups. The Mississippi Heritage Trust was one of the primary leaders of this effort in the nonprofit sphere.

There's a lot to be learned about how federal policy might help homeowners everywhere within the Gulf's solutions and its success stories. How is preservation a tool for rebuilding, with and outside of federal help? Congress held a hearing about this right after the disaster -- but follow up is essential.

Lessons from the Gulf could help us build on programs in all agencies that might all take part in future preservation successes -- not in response to disasters, but proactively, as a part of building stronger, healthy communities with the best of the past and the many good people who care.

IMPORTANT DATES:

Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, March 1-5, 2008

Board of Directors Meeting, Wisconsin, July 2008

The National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers is the professional association of State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) who carry out the national historic preservation program as delegates of the Secretary of the Interior pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. Membership in the NCSHPO is limited to states and territories.

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