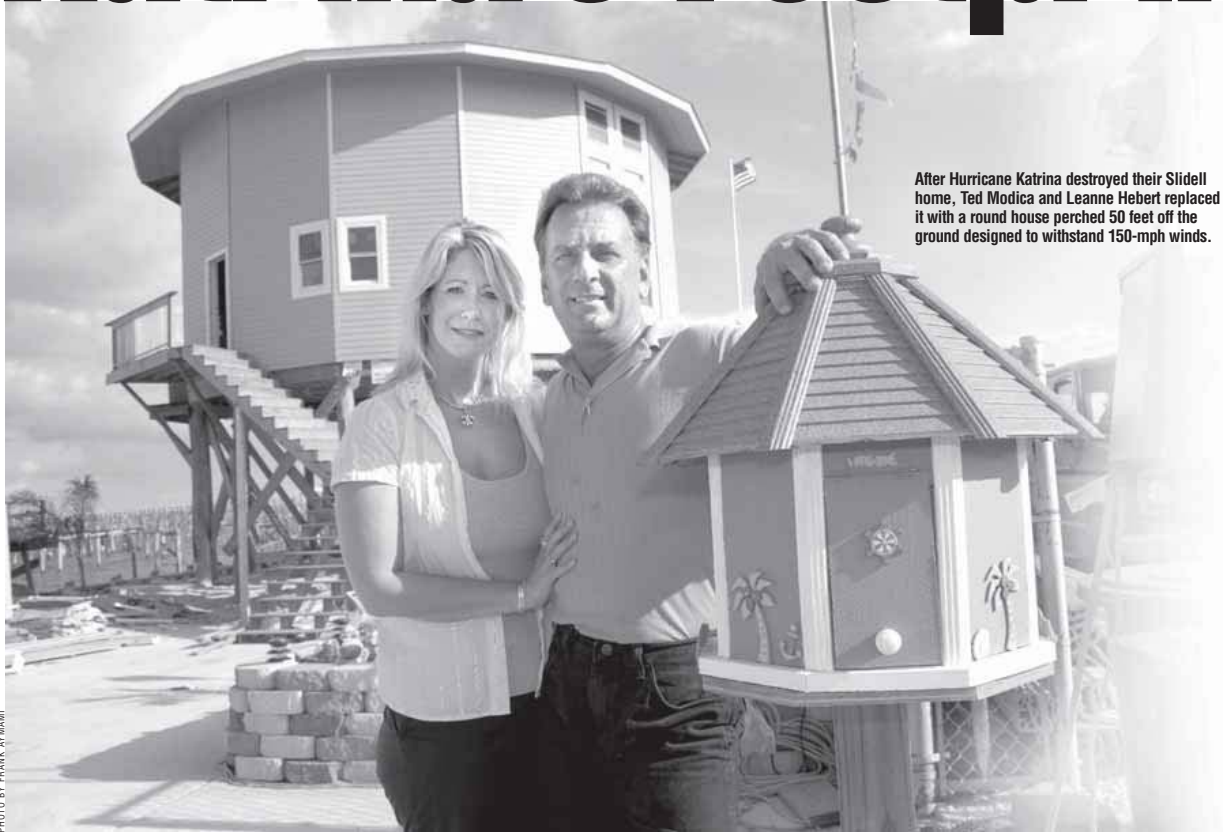


# Katrina's Footprint:



After Hurricane Katrina destroyed their Slidell home, Ted Modica and Leanne Hebert replaced it with a round house perched 50 feet off the ground designed to withstand 150-mph winds.

PHOTO BY FRANK WYMAN

## Hurricane-resistant homes symbolize hope and resilience amid the debris of hard-hit Slidell

By Matthew Penix  
Staff Writer  
Matthew.penix@npsr.com

**F**rom his nearly finished home's vantage point, 50 feet above the hurricane ruins beneath him, Ted Modica saw the flashing police car lights escorting a massive tour bus as it rumbled toward his Lakeview Drive address in Slidell.

He watched until the wheezing brakes hissed and stopped, and out climbed a delegation of local, parish and state political leaders, gazing up at the oddly shaped round house Modica was building.

He smiled. His plan was working. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-New Orleans, Parish President Kevin Davis, Slidell Mayor Ben Morris and Sen. Evan Bayh, D-Ind., took notice of the unusual house during a tour of the ravaged city.

Hoping to inspire others to rebuild and attract attention to what some call a city forgotten in national hurricane coverage, Modica is one of the first to rebuild on the Lake Pontchartrain side of Lakeview Drive.

Better known as "Rat's Nest Road," many claim it's the most ravaged street in St. Tammany Parish, where homes were reduced to concrete slabs and camps' wooden pilings jut out of the surf.

Towering nearly 50 feet off the ground and built with 500-pound walls, Modica's round house is designed to withstand 150-mph winds. It has no single, flat section wider than 8 feet, minimizing large areas where wind can create pressure that would easily collapse a conventional, square or rectangular home. And the circular design insures any force exerted against one side of the structure is distributed out the opposing side, similar to the spokes of a wheel.

"People keep saying you can't rebuild out here. We're saying you can. We just want to give people some incentive," Modica says, while his fiancée Leanne Hebert drinks a beer and chats with neighbors nearby as the sun sets. "I can't wait."

Others can't wait either. Since word of the home spread, Deltac Homes, the 40-year-old Asheville, N.C., company specializing in round houses, has seen a spike in local sales, says Stacey Janney, mar-

### Signs of recovery

*As Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast, its eye clipped Slidell, inundating nearly all of the south side with high winds and water, destroying an estimated 10,000 homes. In the months that followed, international media coverage was scarce, leading Mayor Ben Morris to lash out on live TV, calling Slidell a forgotten city.*

*Since then, with the dedication of the community, local businesses and numerous philanthropic organizations, the city is experiencing what Morris has called one of the "fastest recoveries of any city damaged by the storm."*

### Progress as of June 15:

- Heavily damaged/destroyed homes: approximately 400
- Abandoned homes: 50
- Demolished: four, with 20 pending and 60 in the approval process

Source: North Shore Report staff research

keting representative. At least 11 homes were ordered for the greater New Orleans area including Mandeville, Lafayette, Gretna and three in Slidell.

Modica's friends, Moe and Camille Schwandt, were one Slidell couple inspired to rebuild. Despite

# A year later

## The changing face of St. Tammany — population boom brings growing pains and new opportunities

By Deon Roberts  
Staff Writer  
deon.roberts@nosp.com

**A**fter Hurricane Katrina's floodwaters destroyed John Broggi's St. Bernard Parish home, he began looking for higher land on the North Shore.

"They said the north side of (Interstate 12) is where you want to be if another storm like this comes," says Broggi, the 71-year-old chief engineer for the central plant at Xavier University.

By October he plans to officially become a resident of St. Tammany Parish once he finalizes the purchase of a new \$255,000 home in Covington's Tallow Creek subdivision.

Broggi is not the only South Shore resident to plant roots in St. Tammany since Katrina made landfall a year ago. Tallow Creek has attracted about 40 other families from St. Bernard, says Broggi.

St. Tammany officials say Katrina has changed the face of the North Shore. Like many other public officials, Slidell Councilman at-Large Kevin Kingston cites increased traffic as a major post-Katrina challenge



Former St. Bernard resident John Broggi is buying a home in St. Tammany.

PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMAMI

facing the North Shore.

"We're overpopulated. I'm glad we can accommodate our neighbor cities," Kingston says.

In June, the U.S. Census released post-Katrina population estimates for St. Tammany Parish. As of Jan. 1, the population was estimated at 220,651, up 2 percent from 217,999 as of July 1, 2005, a month before Katrina.

Kingston says most new residents appear to be coming from St. Bernard.

"We're definitely more crowded," says Covington Mayor Candace Watkins. She doesn't know how many people have moved to her city. The city Planning and Zoning Department during the past year approved 1,000 new homes for subdivisions, which is off the charts, she says.

"It used to be 30 homes was a big year for us."

Many subdivisions that had tentative approval months or years before the storm have been expedited since Katrina to meet post-storm demand for housing, says Nahketah Bagby, city planning director.

Before Katrina, The Savannahs subdivision in Covington built 61 homes out of a tentatively approved 259, according to Bagby. She says since the storm, the developers have asked for approvals for all the lots plus for 23 additional lots.

Broggi says higher ground is just one reason for his move to the North Shore. The other

Modica and Hebert thought about an alternative house for hurricanes.

But they needed more proof before plunking \$120,000 into a 2,400-square-foot home. To investigate, they drove to Florida and Pass Christian, Miss., where round homes survived Katrina and previous other hurricanes.

Even after the storms, the round homes stood tall, towering above the ruins of entire neighborhoods. The couple immediately noticed only a few shingles were missing. Modica turned to Hebert. "This is it. We've got insurance. Let's rebuild. Give it one more shot," he said.

"People ask us all the time, 'Why are you going to rebuild?'" Hebert says. "I say, 'If you ever saw the sunrises and sunsets, you'd come back, too.'"

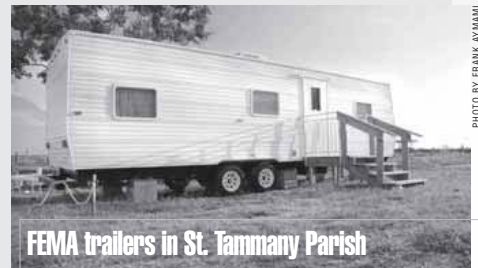
losing their 3,200-square-foot home on Carr Drive, they still want to rebuild by the water. They can't get enough of the pink and blue sunsets, the serenity and "all the fish to catch in the world."

They ordered a Deltec round house and expect to move in by November. It typically takes two weeks to build, arriving in pre-fabricated pieces on 18-wheeler trucks.

"After living in a trailer for 10 months, this just appealed to me to have it up in a short time," says Schwandt. "I had in mind a steel building, but this worked better."

Besides, he says, Modica had already done the research.

After returning three days after Hurricane Katrina to discover splintered pilings and their house's red siding wrapped around a pole three blocks away,



### FEMA trailers in St. Tammany Parish

Total occupied trailers: 10,559  
Total requested but not yet delivered: 964

Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency. Numbers are as of July 14.

PHOTO BY FRANK AYAMAMI

is being within 15 minutes of a hospital for his wife, who has a heart condition.

"If we go back to St. Bernard, there is no cardiac hospital around," he says.

For Watkins, it's strange to walk into a Covington grocery store post-Katrina and not recognize the new residents.

"You see a lot more new faces. But everyone I've met has been very friendly, very warm. What amazes me about these people is they are not sitting around feeling sorry for themselves," she says.

The increased population has its drawbacks. "The traffic accidents have increased dramatically. It's tying the police up," she says.

The growing population is straining Covington's sewerage system. For the past two years, well before Katrina, Covington has needed to enhance its sewage treatment plant and collection system, Watkins says.

Now, the post-Katrina growth is making the need dire, she says.

So on Sept. 30, residents will be able to vote to increase a 2.65-mill property tax to 6.25 mills in order to upgrade two plants and add a third, Watkins says. A mill is worth a \$1 for every \$1,000 of a property's assessed value

beyond the first \$75,000 covered by the homestead exemption. For a \$250,000 home, minus the \$75,000 homestead exemption, 6.25 mills would equate to \$1,093.75 annually.

Mandeville's population increased to approximately 14,000 from 10,500 before Katrina, according to city planners. The increase is causing traffic problems and necessitating road and drainage enhancements, says Mayor Eddie Price. He says residents are coming from St. Bernard, Plaquemines and Orleans parishes.

But the growth has its benefits. From Jan. 1 to July 17, Mandeville collected \$9.6 million in sales taxes, compared with \$7.6 million by the same time last year.

"Sales taxes have been incredible, parishwide and municipalitywide," Price says. •

### North Shore bound

St. Tammany Parish's population is up 2 percent since Hurricane Katrina, according to a Census report in June.

Jan. 1	July 1, 2005	Percentage increase
220,651	217,999	2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

### St. Tammany Parish real estate at a glance

	June	June 2005
Houses sold	506	469
Average price	\$245,967	\$225,660
Total dollar volume	\$124.4 million	\$105.8 million
Average days on market	40	57
Average price per square foot	\$112.84	\$99.61

Source: New Orleans Metropolitan Association of Realtors