

# VOICES OF KATRINA

## Business network steps in to help rebuild post-Katrina

By: Dale P. Velez  
*New Orleans*

As owners of a restoration drycleaning business in New Orleans, my brother Don and I are accustomed to helping homeowners recover from floods and fires – but we never expected to face the situation ourselves.

When Katrina hit, Don and I felt an initial sense of relief that our families and employees were not harmed. Our feelings changed dramatically when we returned from mandatory evacuation and realized our entire business was destroyed, including all five drycleaning stores and our warehouse. Our cleaning equipment and machinery was rusted and corroded so badly they looked if they were 100 years old. We even found garments from our warehouse floating as far as two blocks away.

Despite what seemed to be insurmountable circumstances, we were not going to give up on our

65-year family business. Throughout everything that happened, Don and I realized we were part of a much bigger family because of the support we had as members of the Certified Restoration Drycleaning Network, our insurance restoration franchise business. Partners from CRDN shipped or personally delivered everything we needed to get back in business, including items that we personally lost. Without their assistance we would have been bankrupt and moving on.

Now, less than a year later, Don and I have literally rebuilt our business from the ground up, starting operations all over again in New Orleans. The experience was life changing, allowing us to see our business's importance from a personal light as well as from a professional standpoint. We learned that it truly is possible to pick up the pieces and keep moving forward. With the support of others, it is possible to come home again. ■