

Sacred Run 2006 (www.sacredrun.org)

Weekly Update -- March 20 - 26

Vol 28, Week #6

WEEK SIX:

Our sixth week started in Arkansas, had two overnight stops in Mississippi, and ended with an incredible four-night visit hosted by the wonderful people of the United Houma Nation in Louisiana, about 60 miles from New Orleans. The Houma people have been virtually ignored by FEMA or any other government agency after the brutal devastation seven months ago by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. It was a real eye-opener for all of us to see first-hand the adversity faced by these strong and proud people. While the Houma people are state recognized, the Department of the Interior which oversees the Bureau of Indian Affairs has refused to grant federal recognition to them.

3/20 - Star City, Arkansas - Thanks to pastor Scott Gallimore and the Good Faith United Methodist Church for opening their doors for our group Monday night. And special thanks to Mayor Gene Yarbrough for providing dinner for everyone that evening as well as breakfast Tuesday morning as we prepared to cross the Arkansas state line and move into Mississippi.

3/21 - Vicksburg, Mississippi -- Thanks to pastor Dr. Bob Ford of the Wesley United Methodist Church as well as Julie Alberts and Kevin Ford who so graciously assisted us. We all wished we had more time to spend in Vicksburg, a charming and historic city on the banks of the Mississippi River.

3/22 - Washington, Mississippi - Thanks to pastor Pauline and staff members Roger and Mike for welcoming us to the New Hope Baptist Church which, over several months, housed over 4,500 Katrina/Rita evacuees. At one point 441 people lived in the Sanctuary for an extended period of time.

3/23 - Baton Rouge, Louisiana - Thanks to Pastor Chris Andrews and Ardith Luckey, the education administrator, for their warm southern hospitality at the First United Methodist Church in Baton Rouge. They even provided a huge dinner for everyone that was substantial enough to also provide for our next day's breakfast and lunch. Congratulations also to the Louisiana State University (LSU) Tiger basketball team who upset #1 ranked Duke that same night in their "March Madness" hoop showdown.

POLICE BLOTTER: After last week's traffic stop and racial profiling ("AIM member" handwritten on his ticket) in Dewar, Oklahoma, Dennis "Running Hawk" Shirley had

another cultural exchange with local gendarme, this time just outside Kenner, Louisiana. The Lakota/Oglala from Missouri was driving the support vehicle for three runners including Dennis Banks' 13-year-old son, Minoh. The police spotted Minot running along the roadside and, since it was a school day, stopped him for questioning. The city's policy is to release minors only to their parent or guardian, in this case Dennis Banks (and not Dennis Shirley). The good news . . . the police were courteous and professional and even bought pizza for Minoh and his fellow runners.

Our official Louisiana welcome was held shortly thereafter on Friday afternoon with a ceremony in downtown Kenner presided by Mayor Phil Capato and hosted by Rose at the downtown Wildlife Museum, special thanks also to Morning Dove who provided all of us with special spirit food breakfast and prayers during our entire stay in Houma country.

3/24-27 – Raceland, Louisiana – Thanks to Houma Nation Chief Brenda Dardar Robichaux and her husband, Dr. Mike Robichaux, who graciously hosted us at their home in Raceland. When we first arrived on Friday we were quite surprised to see about 18-20 tents already set up in the sprawling grassy area outside their two-story residence. For the past seven months the Robichaux home has served as base camp for volunteer workers from across the country who have come to Louisiana to help with hurricane relief and rebuilding. The energy and atmosphere of this place is positive and spiritual and uplifting . . . we immediately felt comfortable and peaceful and shared a strong bond with all the Houma people and the wonderful volunteers.

Chief Brenda and Dr. Mike, a former Louisiana senator, also coordinated our walking team's efforts to visit key areas of the Houma population each day and provided us an oral history of the area. We all felt so honored and privileged to walk along the bayous with special sheriff escorts and meet these wonderful people and learn their history.

BENEFIT CONCERT: Saturday evening we participated in a marvelous benefit concert for the United Houma Nation Hurricane Relief Center featuring The Treater Band, Cannes Brulee and Martha Redbone, a long-time friend of Dennis. This tremendously-talented rhythm & blues singer has a newly-released CD with a huge following in Great Britain (Dennis himself sings the opening song on the CD) and was instrumental in arranging this year's Sacred Run to include the New Orleans area. Immediately following the concert everyone returned to the Robichaux' for fireball.

FIREBALL: This traditional Algonquin-Iroquois ritual is conducted yearly to decide who will plant and who will harvest the next crop. Tall posts are set up on each end of the roughly 100-yard long playing field, similar to a soccer field, and then set ablaze in

total darkness. The fireball itself is made of strips of denim rolled into a large ball, soaked in kerosene all day, and then set on fire. The game started when Dennis (wearing gloves) picked up the flaming ball and threw it high in the air. When the fireball crashed to the ground the controlled chaos erupted as each team (shirts vs. skins) tried to advance up and down the field. It was a wild and surreal scene in the Louisiana darkness, blazing goalposts on each end and the flaming ball being kicked and thrown about with a scary “whooshing” sound made by the denim flames. The final score was 3-2. Everyone had a great time and no “major” burns were incurred (although the crowd of rowdy sideline spectators parted like the Red Sea when Kid Valance lost his balance and launched the fireball directly toward them).

SWEAT LODGE: Several of the men worked all day Sunday to dig a fire pit and construct a sweat lodge on the Robichaux property. Everyone then had the opportunity that night to participate in the sacred ceremony which finally ended around midnight.

“ON ASSIGNMENT” On our final night in Cajun country we saw a video of Ed Bradley’s “On Assignment” CBS telecast about Grand Bois and their uphill battle against the oil industry. A legal loophole allows oil companies to legally dump toxic chemicals in their backyard at the Campbell Wells oilfield waste dump, within a few hundred yards of their homes along the bayou. The report shows continued toxic dumping to this day despite proven, scientific evidence of chronic respiratory failure and serious physical impairment of children and adults and cancer-causing agents in the ground, air and local eco-system. It also featured then-senator Dr. Mike who helped champion the cause for these poor, oppressed people who continue to fight insurmountable odds against the wealthy, politically-controlling oil conglomerates.

SPIRITUAL ROLLER-COASTER: The morale of the walkers & runners is running high. From the very start we acknowledged each other, grew to know each other, grew to offer prayers with each other, and grew with each other. Ups & downs, agreements & disagreements, left turn-right turn, talking, yelling, growling, wanting to leave, wanting someone else to leave, kindness & bullheadedness, glares & stares, mean mugging . . . then in the end we walked together knowing our mission is bigger than all of us. Our purpose cannot be swayed because we understand where we are in this whole scheme of life. We go forward.

It’s been a real eye-opener sixth week – fireball; the courageous Houma people; a great concert and cultural exchange; sweat lodge ceremony; Minoh’s police station visit; and several upclose and personal peace walks in the Louisiana bayous and Houma Nation heartland. We continue to spread our message of peace, land and life as we move steadily forward. Next stop: New Orleans’ ninth ward and hardest-hit areas of

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We thank everyone for your prayers and support and healing energy . . . together we are making a difference.

For the latest information and photos of the Sacred Run as we move across the country, please visit www.sacredrun.org To remove your name from this email list, please hit "reply" and type "remove" in the subject line. Thanks for supporting Sacred Run 2006.