

It seems like a decade but it has only been 13 months since the major disaster known as Hurricane Katrina and the failed rescue thereafter. The City of New Orleans looked like a bombed out German city after World War II.

But it wasn't a piece of history or a victim of a world war.

It was an American city that experienced the biggest administrative blunder and mismanagement in the history of this great nation.

Decades of malfeasance in the levee system and a new Homeland Security Agency that was pitiful.

A city that had a population approaching 500,000 was reduced to a pile of debris and holding no more than 40,000. New Orleans was just about down for the count. However, changes have been slow but changes have come.

Today, there are more than 200,000 resilient souls bringing the city back.

Many won't return but there are significant numbers of new people coming to make a new start for themselves and join in the making of a new city.

New Orleans is becoming economically diverse and appealing to a strong Black middle class.

Within the next decade the city will exceed its old population of 500,000 and will have a much smaller percentage of poverty.

Employment and opportunities will be the main reasons.

Mayor Ray Nagin has so far lived up to his pledge of opening doors for Black owned businesses. Historical procurements are taking place and it has been made clear to the previous crew of "good ol' boys" that the times have changed. Diversity in the procurement process is now real. It seems that every educated person we meet in New Orleans is thinking entrepreneurial.

They either want to participate in the business infrastructure of New Orleans or they want to assist via their professional roles in furthering the new environment along.

In the past many minority businesses were denied growth because they weren't bondable. Major bids required surety bonds and they just weren't available to deserving minority businesses.

The main reason was that local insurance agents were discriminating in how they offered their policies.

But today, like the Delfonics, we say "didn't we blow your mind this time".

The NBCC and the Surety and Fidelity Association have identified minority agents around the nation to work with New Orleans minority contractors who win bids requiring bonding.

Contractors are now being able to compare bonding rates and quotes.

They have a choice of which company they are going to choose to grow with.

Those who are not yet bondable are given technical assistance so that they can become bondable within a short period of time.

A Bonding Assistance Program and a city that demands minority participation in every project reminds one of Maynard Jackson's Atlanta or Harold Washington's Chicago. Could New Orleans become the next "Boom Town" for Black owned businesses?

I feel it certainly can and it is unfolding right before my eyes.

Now that the playing field is starting to level the city is going to demand a good inventory of Black owned businesses and entrepreneurs. The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) alone will let contracts worth over \$5 billion in neighborhood building.

This will have, as a minimum, 20% minority participation, 5% women business participation and 10% Section 3 (training and employment for people living under the poverty level).

Note that I said neighborhood building not affordable housing.

Major projects will require a mix of scattered single family homes, multi-family residents, quality school availability, retail areas and modern medical facilities.

We are talking about the real deal!

A quality of life for the residents of New Orleans is starting to take form.

In all, there is going to be during the next ten years at least \$70 billion in development and construction alone in New Orleans. From a new airport and Trump Towers to city infrastructure and levee protection this city will be humming.

At every turn Black business will be involved.

We are talking about a new “Mecca” for Black business.

Are we ready?

2007 will be the “Call” for qualified and bona fide architects, engineers, program managers, construction managers, contractors, realtors, investors, developers, trucking companies, landscapers, accountants, IT professionals, and retail store operators. I can go on and on. Also, and equally important, will be the fact that there will be an extremely high demand for employees.

There are more jobs than workers right now and it will become more so in the coming years.

This equates to great pay scales and consumable dollars for the local businesses.

Business owners and hard workers New Orleans wants you! Consider making a change.

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