

| In the Legal Community: Rebuilding New Orleans |

**Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Blitz Build,
Upper 9th Ward, New Orleans, May 2008**
By Chief Judge Ginger Berrigan

"6:30 a.m.? You've got to be kidding!"

The e-mail said volunteers for the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Blitz Build need to report at 6:30 a.m. Okay, okay. Lay out the clothes, set the alarm, go to bed early.

When I got to the site of the effort, I understood why the early start was necessary. Several thousand other early risers swarmed around a huge tent, checking in, filling water bottles, donning Carter Build T-shirts, and high-fiving friends and strangers. After an inspirational pep talk, we dispersed to our assignments.

My job was to put up siding. Measure, cut, carry, level it, nail it in; measure, cut—oops, dropped the siding and broke it; measure again, carry it more carefully, level it, nail it in. My partner was a cheery woman named Diana, who turned out to be the homeowner. Wow, that's great! Ouch, I hammered my finger, so I quit talking. Measure, cut, carry. Who is that across the street? Harry Connick Jr. Wow again! Where's my measuring tape?

After being on the siding for a while, I joined a group of nuns from southern California who were painting strips of siding blue. Slapping paint was a return to my childhood—with sprinkles of paint flying all over my clothes and in my hair. Pretty soon I was as blue as the siding was. Who are those weird looking guys staring at everyone? Ah, it's the Secret Service. The President must be around. I used the excuse of carrying some siding to the front of the house, and there they were; Jimmy and Rosalynn, on their knees on the porch, hammering in boards. They're both in their 80s. They should be sitting on a porch, not building it. Inspirational!

Shortly before noon, we returned to the big tent for lunch. We lined up for "N'awlins" jambalaya, greens, and corn bread. Guess who I sat with? President and Mrs. Carter. Ah, being chief judge has its perks. They're a wonderfully warm and friendly couple. I asked him his favorites of the books he wrote. "An Hour Before Daylight," he said. He



(clockwise from top) President Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter; Chief Judge Ginger Berrigan; one home of the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Blitz Build; Habitat for Humanity sign.



wrote down the title. Great, I thought, I now have an autograph, but, alas, no camera.

As the crews were summoned back to work, I went on to my day job with a great deal of regret.

In one week, the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Blitz Build completed seven

homes, framed and dried in 20 more, and planned to turn over the keys to another 25 before the end of May.

In a word—awesome! **TFL**

Hon. Ginger Berrigan is the chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.