

LEGAL HEROES:

Volunteers Step Up to Help in Countless Ways after Hurricane Harvey

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Long-term Recovery: The Mission of the United Way and Lynne Liberato

By Polly Fohn

Lynne Liberato again has been called on to use an expertise she wishes she did not have. This expertise began when she chaired the United Way's recovery efforts following Tropical Storm Allison and then developed after chairing the recovery taskforces for hurricanes Katrina and Ike. So, before the rains stopped, Lynne found herself agreeing to chair the United Way's Hurricane Harvey Recovery Taskforce.

"When United Way's Linda O'Black contacted me to ask if I would head the taskforce, I was watching television and seeing Houstonians rescue their neighbors from flood waters," explained Lynne. "I was so moved by the generosity of people in our community—really heroism—and the tragedy that our neighbors were enduring, there was no way I could say 'no.'"

A long-time volunteer for United Way (and appellate partner at Haynes and Boone), she will tell you that her passion for the work of the United Way comes from her deep knowledge of the work of the United Way. She has served as the chair of the board of directors, the head of the community campaign, and the chair of the fund allocation committee.

"No organization is better than our United Way in addressing the needs of people recovering from disasters," she said. "We are there for the short-term,



Lynne Liberato, right, who heads the United Way Hurricane Harvey Recovery Taskforce, experienced the flood firsthand with her mother, Patty Liberato, who had four feet of water in her home. They are pictured here shortly after the rain subsided.


but more importantly for the long-term. Understandably, the public's attention ends long before people's lives are close to normal. The United Way will be helping people get their lives back for the next three to four years that it will take."

The taskforce is charged with allocating the \$44 million raised for the United Way disaster recovery. People's needs, of course, were immediate, so the taskforce first met the Friday after the rains stopped and distributed funds to approved providers that afternoon. Lynne notes that the United Way is able to act so quickly because of what she describes as "infrastructure in place" to allow quick action. She explains that infrastructure is knowledge of the best providers, relationships built over decades from its integral place

in the community, and trust. She also credits the volunteers and staff of the United Way.

"Members of the taskforce come to our regularly-scheduled meetings with great ideas and tough questions," said Lynne. "Most of them are business executives, and they all know how to manage money, engage in strategic thinking, and they love Houston. And, they are supported by experienced, caring staff members."

Now, while keeping an eye on short term recovery efforts, United Way is directing funds to long-term needs, especially home repair and case management, which funds disaster case managers who help individual families navigate the complexities of recovery. It also supports behavioral healthcare and makes small grants to organizations with specific needs that can make a big impact. Of note, it serves a four-county area, including Harris, Montgomery, Waller and Chambers County.

Having been president of the Houston Bar and the State Bar, Lynne offers thanks to the experience she gained leading a large organization of many volunteers and outstanding staffs. "The experience I gained from Bar leadership translates to the community service work that I do. Both have deeply enriched my life, and I am so grateful to be able to bring some of that experience to help our community now in what must be the worst disaster we have ever experienced." 

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