

Disaster recovery powered by essential wisdom from a chance encounter

An American non-profit organization struggled with its disaster recovery efforts, until Japanese manufacturing knowledge radically transformed its activities for the better.

St. Bernard Project (SBP)



Right:
CEO & Co-Founder
Zack Rosenberg
Left:
Director of Client Services
& Co-Founder
Liz McCartney



Rosenburg and McCartney helped rebuild after Hurricane Katrina. But the massive amount of damage eventually became too much.

It was a day that turned lives upside down. In late August 2005, Hurricane Katrina barreled down on the southeastern United States in one of the worst natural disasters in the nation's history. Some 230,000 square kilometers—an area about the size of Japan's main island of Honshu—were devastated by the impact. Louisiana and Mississippi took the brunt of the damage, and nearly 80percent of New Orleans' urban districts were inundated when the city's levees collapsed. The number of victims swelled to 1 million people, with 400,000 of them living in evacuation shelters. The St. Bernard Parish was one of the hardest-hit neighborhoods of all. Generous support flowed in from across America and around the world to help the victims return to life before the storm. Lawyer Zack Rosenberg and schoolteacher Liz McCartney founded the non-profit organization St. Bernard Project (SBP) soon after the disaster. Their goal was to help people rebuild their homes. With the help of military veterans and

volunteers, the group rebuilt more than 400 houses over the next five years. Despite their successes, however, Rosenberg and McCartney were keenly aware of their limitations.





- ① Today, SBP not only rebuilds homes, but also teaches the lessons it's learned in the process.
- ② SBP now posts job progress, tool locations, and other information so that everyone knows the current status of the project.
- ③ Thanks to its teams of volunteers, SBP continues to rebuild homes.
- ④ A resident cuts the ribbon on her newly completed home. Everyone shares in the joy of the moment.

St. Bernard Project
 The St. Bernard Project was founded in 2005 with the goal of rebuilding homes in the southeastern United States that were devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Military veterans and volunteers participate in their activities.

Toyota made us who we are!

Given the bewildering amount of devastation that the storm left in its wake, rebuilding 400 homes was hardly something to boast about. They had given it everything they had for five years, but had reached their limit.

Just then, Toyota entered the picture. Rosenberg described the encounter. "We hit a huge wall. There were still so many people that couldn't rebuild their homes, that didn't know when they were going to be able to return. That's when we learned that Japanese manufacturing know-how could be applied to homebuilding as well. We worked with Toyota to come up with a process."

The activities of Rosenberg and his team came out of the Toyota Production System (TPS). The system smooths out supplies and workflows in various processes without pushing any of them beyond their limits. In recent years, TPS has been effectively applied in service, agriculture and medical settings,

in addition to manufacturing sites.

Toyota began working with SBP to overhaul the project's reconstruction process and make it more efficient. "Easy-to-read charts showing where tools and supplies were located reduced the amount of time wasted looking for things, while reducing the amount of wasted materials helped cut back on construction costs while minimizing waste." The individual improvements were small, but they added up to significant results. The home building process was shortened from 12-18 weeks to an impressive six weeks per home. With the help of its 150,000 volunteers, SBP was able to use its improved system to successfully complete 1,400 homes in the next five years.

Back in a house of their own for the first time in 10 years

"I've finally come back to a real home."

Support poured into New Orleans from around the world after the hurricane struck, but good intentions weren't the only thing that came into the region. Victims who received subsidies from the government were subject to widespread scams. Pamela Marshall was the victim of a building scam that forced her to suspend construction work. SBP interceded on her behalf, collecting construction funds from charities and finally rebuilding her home in the winter of 2016.

"My daughter and I bounced around to seven different homes," Marshall remembered. "At one point I lost faith. I felt like a pebble being tossed around. But SBP treated me like a person." After 10 long years, the Marshall family was finally able to spend Christmas in their own home. Her daughter, who was only two at the time of the disaster, said, "Even though I don't remember the house in which I was born, I feel that I've finally come back to a real home."

"Our goal at SBP is shrinking time between disaster and recovery in America," Rosenberg explained. "We're taking

the Japanese know-how we acquired and passing it on to numerous non-profits and companies in the U.S. I think we'll eventually have a global impact." The St. Bernard Project is currently training 14 organizations on its home-rebuilding methods, and 52 groups on structural repairs. Ambitious people are passing the baton of human knowledge everywhere—across companies, across countries, and beyond.

