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Gulf Coast Code Pro's receive assistance on local level

Reducing insurance and enhancing economic development and public safety

(With the exception of five Coastal area counties, Mississippi statutes do not mandate that counties adopt building codes. However, codes may be adopted on the local level by any board of supervisors. For any county that has adopted, or is considering adopting building codes, the organization outlined in this article may be helpful.)

You may have noticed in the wake of the damage caused by hurricanes Katrina and Rita, that much has been written about adopting more stringent building codes, employing improved technology in construction projects, assuring better construction oversight from state and local levels, and effectively reshaping the governance of the building industry. Not much discussion has taken place, however, regarding how the already heavily burdened locales in Mississippi and Louisiana are to address this new set of needs amidst all the economic, political and industry related obstacles. One possible solution to this dilemma is the Institute for Building Technology and Safety (IBTS). IBTS was created by governmental organizations including the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National League of Cities, the International City Managers Association, the Council of State Governments, and the National Governors Association as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit service organization specifically to address these types of needs at all levels of government. "Our mission is to provide greater public safety, improve economic development, and to generally support the efforts of government and industry", says Paul Hancher, IBTS' building official and Senior Technical Manager.

To address these needs, IBTS has programs in 36 states with clients such as town and city planning and building departments, developers of new communities being created for military personnel and their families on installations across the United States, county, parish and state agencies, as well as departments of the federal government. "Some people think we just do plan reviews and inspections for building projects", says Hancher "but we're really

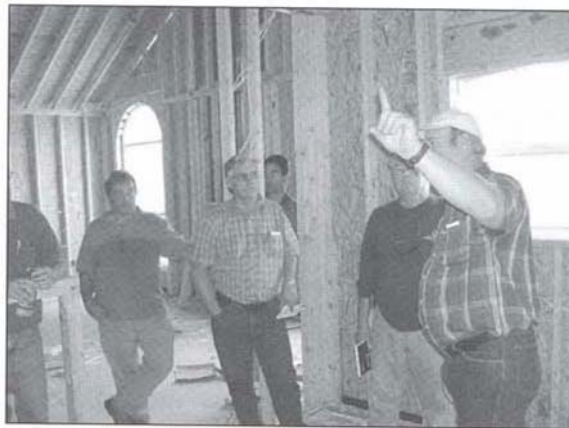
much more than that. We're conducting research on everything from accessibility to affordability to energy efficient and sustainable construction, but we also train and staff building departments on the local level." And in Louisiana, IBTS is even developing building departments, literally from the ground up.

Following a recent visit to Louisiana Gulf-region parishes, Robert Weiner, Councilman, Second

District New Castle (Delaware) County Council and NACo's representative on IBTS' Board of Directors, said "I am pleased to report that I received glowing reports from many local parish officials, from our State affiliate, from Jerry Jones, State Director of Facility Planning and Control, from Bhola Dhume, Deputy Director of the City of New Orleans Department of Safety and Permits, from Henry Fry,

Office of State Fire Marshal, and even from the Governor's office regarding the exemplary performance by IBTS, NACo's strategic partner." Robert Weiner has served as Chair of the NACo Land Use and Growth Management Subcommittee since 1998 and has been chair of the Sustainability Leadership Team since 2000.

One example of how a neighboring state worked with IBTS to address different circumstances but similar regulatory needs is that of Louisiana's mandatory adoption of a statewide building code. IBTS' Chief Operations Officer, Shyam Choudhary explained that the Louisiana legislature had implemented a Statewide Building Code in response to the insurance industry's unwillingness to underwrite un-inspected homes and businesses. This unfunded mandate was not well received by the parish level governments because it did not provide for a vehicle to develop, oversee and validate the compliance sys



Here a lead IBTS inspector educates other inspectors on a job site.

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tem. "You have to keep in mind", says Choudhary, "that 56 of the 64 parishes had no building department to speak of, and there were only about a dozen ICC certified building officials in the state at that time." Clearly, there was a lot of work to be done, and no clear direction as to how to accomplish it.

Roland Dartez, Executive Director of the Louisiana Police Jury

Association (Louisiana's equivalent to MAS), an organization that represents all 64 parishes, stated that IBTS has proven its competence and commitment in Louisiana. "IBTS met with our members, assessed their immediate needs and hit the ground running. Their association with NACo and expertise of building code issues allowed our parishes to begin the long process of rebuilding and establish a defined building code office that will benefit our state for years to come."

IBTS is also working with many small to medium size jurisdictions facing the challenges of growth. IBTS is working with the town of St. Gabriel to develop a master plan and implement a development strategy for what is expected to be essentially a new small town on the outskirts of Baton Rouge. IBTS is providing full-time on-site building department inspection services for the City of Hampton Virginia, for conversion of an older shopping mall to a modern Town Center multi-use development. These are examples of projects of fixed duration for which IBTS' temporary services allowed governments to enhance economic development by efficiently providing services without having to hire additional government personnel or unnecessarily delay development.

In a June, 2006 News Article a team of engineers from Mississippi State University's department of civil and environmental engineering stated that repair, reconstruction and new development projects planned and underway without regard for strengthened building codes would be in jeopardy during subsequent hurricane seasons. The team noted that residences and structures replaced or repaired "...without due consideration..." represent a serious, continuing liability. While the new building codes increase design wind loads, a study of the proposed building

codes did not provide clear guidance, and in the absence of a statewide building code, the city and county officials assumed more responsibility.

In Mississippi, IBTS has monitored and assessed the state's manufactured housing industry for the federal government for 30 years. With the recent issuance of HUD's model installation standards, IBTS is providing training on the installation stan-

dards and how these standards are enforced at the local level. IBTS works closely with the Gene Humphrey, Deputy Fire Marshal and administrator of the Mississippi State Administrative Agency under the State Fire Marshal's Office that oversees manufactured and modular home construction and installation in the state. For further information on manufactured or modular

homes in Mississippi, contact Gene Humphrey at genehumphrey@mid.state.ms.us or (601) 359-1061.

With offices in Herndon, Virginia, Baton Rouge and Bossier City, Louisiana, Washington, DC and Seattle, Washington and field offices in 36 states, IBTS provides impartial evaluations, research and technical assistance to Federal, state and local government agencies. The Institute augments the existing resources of government in the following areas of the built environment:

- Independent verification and validation of building systems and regulatory programs
- Building design review, plan/peer review, and technical assistance
- Military Housing (Plan Reviews, Inspections)
- Quality Assurance
- Building Inspection
- Education and Training
- Smart Growth and Sustainable Design, Green Building and Energy Conservation
- Business process re-engineering and information technology (IT) support
- Facilitation and coordination among Federal, state, and local government agencies

For more information about IBTS, please visit our web site at www.ibts.org. For further information about any of the items presented here, contact Paul Hancher at (703) 481-2009 or Phancher@ibts.org.



IBTS CEO Ashok Goswami (right) and team inspect a home in St. Tammany Parish (Louisiana)