

# UHA News



The monthly newsletter for the community and partners of the University Heights Association.

March 2006

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 2

## Albany Law students spend holidays helping Hurricane Katrina victims

Three Albany Law School students spent their holiday break providing legal assistance to Louisiana and Mississippi victims of Hurricane Katrina under the supervision of practicing attorneys.

Ben Silbert '08, Matthew Truax '06 and Leah Williamson '07 worked with the Student Hurricane Network, a national association of law students and administrators dedicated to providing long-term assistance to communities in the aftermath of hurricane destruction.

### *Hard work in the "Big Easy"*

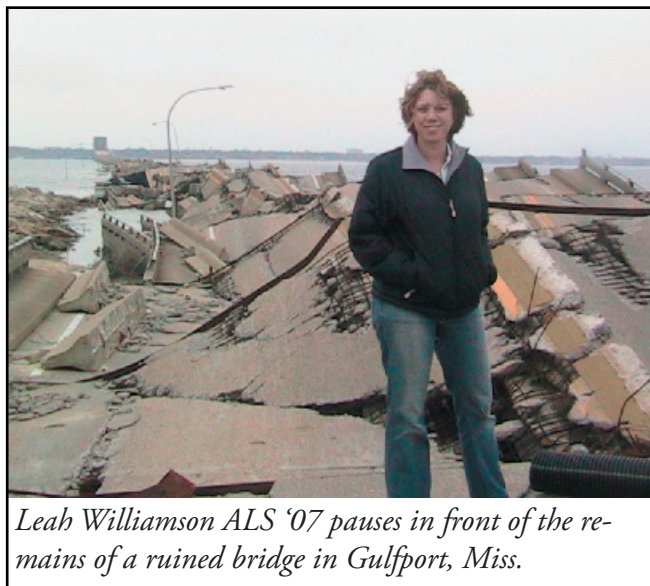
Truax left for New Orleans on New Year's Day 2006. For the next two weeks, he called St. Luke's Episcopal Church his home, where he and 40 other volunteers slept on cots in the basement.

Truax was assigned to the city's lower Ninth Ward, an area severely flooded when the levees were breached by Katrina and Rita.

Truax worked on a lawsuit filed against the city by several housing advocacy groups. The class action lawsuit, *Kirk v. City of New Orleans*, demanded that residents are notified before any



Matthew Truax gets an up-close look at Hurricane Katrina's destruction in New Orleans' lower Ninth Ward.



Leah Williamson ALS '07 pauses in front of the remains of a ruined bridge in Gulfport, Miss.

damaged homes are demolished. In late December, city officials had announced their intention to demolish within weeks about 2,500 buildings that inspectors found to be dangerously unstable after Hurricane Katrina.

Truax spent long days interviewing survivors, chronicling their stories, participating in court and surveying homes - in many cases, the remains of homes.

### *Evictions in Mississippi*

Williamson worked with the Mississippi Center for Justice observing eviction proceedings in the Justice Courts of Gulfport, Biloxi and Ocean Springs. The Center was seeking a three-week snapshot of how tenants' rights in its region were affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Mississippi has a huge housing shortage due Katrina's destruction. Tenants, jobless from the storm, can't pay rent and landlords are raising rent due to the housing shortage. The combination is lethal. Williamson watched the chaos play out in the courts.

Often landlords could not contact tenants after they evacuated. In one case, a tenant's trailer was demolished by FEMA with all of their belongings still

inside. The landlord claimed that he had posted signs alerting the tenants to remove their belongings.

Williamson interviewed tenants after their hearings to learn that they were unaware that free legal representation was available. "I handed out flyers from the Miss. Center for Justice and encouraged the tenants to contact the organization if they were interested in appealing the decision,"

she said.

Williamson stayed in a church in Gulfport, along with a volunteer construction crew that was rebuilding the house of the church's pastor. Williamson drove down to Mississippi with her partner, a filmmaker, who documented the trip with her video camera.

### *Notices for Demolition*

Silbert also worked in the New Orleans lower Ninth Ward. His time was divided among three projects: conducting research on the *Kirk v. City of New Orleans* case for the People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF), the Pro Bono Project and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN).

### *Settlement with the city*

A few days after Truax and Silbert returned home from New Orleans, they received word that the city agreed to give homeowners advance notice and the advocacy groups dropped their suit.

Truax said the experience helped him realize the rewards of *pro bono* work, something, he added, he never could have learned in a classroom.

University Heights Association was established in 1995 to create an academic/medical consortium of international stature. The four member institutions – Albany Law School, Albany College of Pharmacy, Albany Medical College and The Sage Colleges - are a unique collaboration promoting quality education, premium health care, public discourse of important issues, cutting-edge research and technology, vibrant neighborhoods and progressive private and public partnerships. UHA continues to build upon a network of shared resources to enrich academic connections for the benefit of students, faculty, staff and the surrounding neighborhoods.

University Heights Association, Inc.  
130 New Scotland Ave.  
Albany, NY 12208  
518/434-9603 phone  
518/462-3207 fax

Peter Hughes  
Executive Director

Laura Lang  
Public Relations Coordinator/Office Manager  
mail@universityheights.org

## Did you know ...

*the new ACP Student Center will open this spring, featuring dining facilities to serve all four UHA schools?!?!?*

## Spotlight on Regional Photography at the Opalka

The Opalka Gallery on the Sage College of Albany campus is hosting the 28th Annual Photography Regional exhibition from March 10 to April 16.

The 18 photographers featured in this year's exhibit represent some of the strongest photography being done in the Capital Region. The work reflects the dominant character of photography in the region at this time.

The Annual Photography Regional was started in 1979 in response to the exclusion of photography from the Mohawk-Hudson Regional, an open juried show. Since then, photography has been included, but the Photography Region has remained a strong annual tradition. This is the second year in the exhibition's history that it is an invitational rather than open juried show.

Featured photographers are: Martin Benjamin, David Brickman, Timothy Cahill, Chris DeMarco, Jeri Eisenberg, Ray Felix, Donna Fitzgerald, Jim Flosdorf, Laura Elise Glazer, Robert Gullie, Mark McCarty, Gail Nadeau, Rob O'Neil, Joe Putrock, Tom Santelli, George W. Simmons, Mary E. Spinelli, and

Marie Triller.  
For more information, contact

the Opalka Gallery at (518) 292-7742 or opalka@sage.edu.

### Panel Presentation

Sunday, April 2, 2-4 pm

#### *Lauren Bess Berley*

Lauren built her photography career in fashion and portraiture in Los Angeles, then relocated to New York after 9/11 and documented the rescue and relief efforts; she now lives in Albany.

#### *Mark Joseph Kelly*

Mark is the founder and director of Exposed Gallery in Delmar, NY, the only gallery in the region dedicated to fine art photography, and owner of Delmar-based marketing and consulting firm MJK Management.

#### *Shannon Phinney*

Shannon is a young photographer who resides in Albany, NY.

#### *Jim Richard Wilson, moderator*

Jim is the exhibit curator and Opalka Gallery director.



Robert Gullie  
*Stoop Project #3: Mother with 3 Children*  
Hand-tinted Black and White Photograph  
10 ¼ x 10 ¼ in.

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UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS  
ASSOCIATION, INC.  
130 New Scotland Ave.  
Albany, N.Y. 12208-3425

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