

OPINION

[Editorials](#) | [Op-Ed](#) | [Letters](#) | [Ben Sargent](#) | [Columnists](#) | [Insight](#)[E-MAIL THIS PAGE](#)[PRINT THIS PAGE](#)[MOST POPULAR](#)

COMMENTARY

Sicard: Helping the evacuees, one family at a time**Anna Hanks Sicard, LOCAL CONTRIBUTOR**

Tuesday, September 20, 2005

Sitting in the front seat of Felecia Williams's ex-husband's truck on a warm September morning in Austin's Rosedale neighborhood, I can safely say that three weeks ago, neither of us expected to be there.

Just moments before, when I had introduced myself, Williams and siblings Josh and Jason were moments away from a trip around the corner to pick up a floral sofa donated by a Rosedale resident.

Matriarch Cassandra Williams, along with several children and grandchildren, fled New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Eight members of their family, including Cassandra's sons Josh and Jason and daughter Zina Barré, are rebuilding their lives here in Austin. They are doing it with assistance from their Rosedale neighbors, St. Andrew's Episcopal School and various Austin police officers.

Like many people in my neighborhood, I found out about the family through the Rosedale list-serve. The list-serve is like an immediate, electronic community newsletter, keeping track of events in this neighborhood west of Hyde Park. Many recent messages have been about the new family on Sinclair Street.

Cassandra Williams and her family had a rough trip from New Orleans to Rosedale. When the levee broke, they went to stay with a neighbor who lived on higher ground. When the water rose again, they made their way to the Interstate 10 bridge, then into the abysmal Superdome.

After leaving New Orleans, they stayed with a relative in Houston. They ended up in Austin after Felecia Williams, Cassandra's stepdaughter and a longtime Austin resident and member of the Austin Police Department, reunited with them in Houston.

Felecia Williams' daughter attends St. Andrews. After hearing that Felecia had relatives coming to Austin, fellow St. Andrews parents offered their vacant rent house on Sinclair Street. The house was then vacant because it needed electrical work.

While the owners spent Labor Day weekend wrangling with the house's physical defects, the neighbors found

out what was happening and pitched in. Sort of like a reverse burglary, every time the homeowners turned around, another piece of furniture had arrived. A fridge came first, then the food to fill it.

Things haven't slowed down much since. Neighbors have dropped by with baked goods. One took a list of needed items to Target and bought every one. Another offered the use of a washing machine. Josh told me that every time the family gets a box of donated goods unpacked, someone shows up with something else. Nearby St. Andrew's enrolled Barré's two children, and gift cards are still arriving from the school.

Hearing all of this makes me so proud of how my neighbors have pulled together to help this family get settled here. As a key individual connected to this house-raising told me, it's a power that is latent in every neighborhood in Austin. After all, the only way our new residents are going to feel at home is if we behave in a neighborly way toward them.

You might wonder, "How does this apply to me? My neighborhood doesn't have a list-serve, or even any

evacuees." Don't worry, you can help welcome people to Austin, one family at a time. Organizations such as Community Action Development & Assistance (C.A.D.A.) are trying to find "Austin friends" for each evacuee family. Sort of like a big buddy/little buddy system at summer camp, these Austinites will help make sure that each family gets the personal attention it needs to feel welcome.

So get out there and make some new friends. If you aren't comfortable talking to strangers, at least mak some muffins, which go a long way toward bridging cultural differences and ending awkward silences. New Orleans is a city with a rich culinary heritage, but don't worry if the best you can do is Betty Crocker. It was the best I could do — and at least one Williams family member didn't mind.

Sicard is a freelance writer in Austin. Contact C.A.D.A. at cada.austin@gmail.com or 480-9556.

Advertise [Online](#) or [in Print](#) | [Subscribe to the Newspaper](#) | [Make us your Homepage](#)[Make us your Homepage](#)
Presented by The Austin American-Statesman. [Contact us](#). [Corrections](#). [Site Requirements](#).
Please read our [Privacy Policy](#). By using this site, you accept the terms of our [Visitor Agreement](#).
Copyright 2001-2006 Cox Texas Newspapers, L.P. All rights reserved.

