

NEWS RELEASE

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New Orleans Refugee, University of Saint Mary Student Discovers Family Member is Safe & Sound

(Leavenworth, Kan.)—For days following the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, University of Saint Mary student Nick Gordon didn't know the status of his 88-year old grandfather. Ed Gordon, Sr. refused to evacuate hurricane-ravaged New Orleans for days. On Wednesday, Sept. 14, Gordon received a bit of good news—his grandfather is alive and well.

"I was ecstatic to actually hear his voice," Gordon said. "He was happy to talk to me; he hadn't talked to any family since the storm. He was telling me about all his experiences—I was amazed he's still alive."

Gordon, born and raised in New Orleans, fled to Kansas two days after the storm ravaged the Louisiana coast. His family escaped Katrina's wrath, moving to Lenexa, Kan. just days before the storm hit. Gordon was enrolled at the University of New Orleans for the 2005-06 school year but following the storm, on the day the University of Saint Mary announced "Operation: Living the Mission," he transferred to Saint Mary. His grandfather, however, refused to leave the house he built nearly 60-years ago.

According to Gordon, his grandfather's home was invaded by 12-13 feet of flood water. Despite hip and knee replacement surgery, Gordon, Sr. was able to climb the house's steps to the second level. He stayed in the house he helped erect, in free-standing water, for six days refusing to leave. Nick's mother and father entered Gordon Sr. into a U.S. Coast Guard urgent search and rescue request online database. The Coast Guard did the rest.

The Coast Guard rescued Gordon, Sr. and transported him to the Louisiana Superdome, and then later to Oschner Hospital in New Orleans where he was treated for a few bumps and bruises, an infected foot, and malnutrition. Coincidentally, Oschner was one of only a handful of New Orleans hospitals that was not flooded.

The Gordon family, though, still had no idea about the status of their loved one—until a simple twist of fate changed everything. A woman in Leavenworth, Kan. read about the Gordon family's peril and decided to enter Ed Gordon's name into a national Red Cross missing person's web site database. The database showed Gordon Sr. was alive and well in New Orleans. She called the university's Student Life office to pass on the good news. The word eventually trickled down to Nick. Now, he and his family can get back to life as normal.

"The mood is a lot different (at home). Everyone was depressed and morbid, for a while," he said. "We're still worried about our homes, but it's always good to know that we know where all our friends and family are. It takes a lot off our shoulders to know that we didn't lose anybody in the storm. That's always a good thing."

Gordon wasn't the only person that was forced to evacuate their home. A few days after Gordon arrived at the university's doorstep, Amy Bordelon from Pearlinton, Miss. came to USM via the Red Cross. She and her mother escaped their home in Mississippi with only a few clothes. Both Bordelon and Gordon are now living in the dorms at Saint Mary.

For university President Sister Diane Steele, "Operation: Living the Mission" would never have been possible if the Leavenworth/Lansing community did not band together. "The outpouring of support for the community has been outstanding," Steele said. "People in the community offered up their homes to let students stay with them. Alums called offering clothing for the students. All of this amazingly came together within a matter of hours. We are thankful for the gracious charity people have shown us."

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