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Louisiana Woman Documents Katrina Experience Online
Blogger Uses New Media to Comment On, Learn From Tragedy

BATON ROUGE, La. (Aug. 23, 2006) – “Greetings this is Margaret Saizan reporting on Hurricane Katrina from Baton Rouge Louisiana... Right now everything feels pretty normal - literally the calm before the storm.” That’s how one Baton Rouge personal life coach and mother of three began documenting the storm that became the nation’s worst natural disaster. Nearly 365 days and more than 1,400 posts later, www.hurricane-katrina.org continues to be a resource for journalists, area residents and news aficionados from 144 countries, with personal perspective and national resources for those who survived the storm.

“I started this blog on the eve of Hurricane Katrina’s landfall to provide live coverage of the hurricane and to pass the time while waiting out the storm,” explained Saizan. “The blog soon morphed into a critical resource in the early aftermath, and it continues to be a news source for keeping the issues in the forefront.”

With the new mission came a new name – Beyond Katrina. Logging more than 400,000 visitors in the months after the storm, the blog’s focus is on activism and recovery. But it also provides valuable tools to help people prepare for another storm, research on Louisiana’s ever-shrinking coastline, and the popular clock counting down to the end of the 2006 hurricane season.

Writing about anything on a daily basis requires a lot of work and unyielding discipline. Many blogs have faded away because their authors could not commit the time or energy to make them last. But Margaret Saizan has bloomed and turned her blog into a lively form of citizen journalism that continues to evolve. She is currently syndicated on BlogBurst, a site which delivers online blog content to mainstream heavyweights like Gannett publications, The Washington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, Houston Chronicle, and the San Antonio Express-News. She has been interviewed by *The Washington Post*, *The Week* magazine, Scotland’s *Sunday Herald* and CNN.

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In addition to traditional media outlets, educators and business professionals have relied on Saizan's daily record to teach and inform their constituents. Saizan recently assisted Applesseed, a network of independent public interest law centers with offices in 18 states, including Louisiana, in developing a report to provide a snapshot of the status of evacuees in host cities one year after the hurricane; and facilitating communication between the many agencies working with evacuees in host communities throughout the region. And an instructional specialist with the Georgia Department of Education at the National Science Center/Fort Discovery Educational Technology Training Center in Augusta, Ga. Used "Beyond Katrina" as a key language, culture, and environmental story for an educational pilot program.

"I think about how traditional journalists and ordinary citizens alike can harness the power of this new form of media to forge new ground in responding to crisis," added Saizan. "The contribution of blogs and citizen journalism to the disaster has truly awakened me to the enormous power and potential of real time, collaborative, personal and social media."

As the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina is commemorated, journalists from across the globe will return to New Orleans and south Louisiana to see what's transpired one year since the devastation. But residents in the trenches like Saizan, who have documented the events from a local, real-time perspective, provide an invaluable resource for traditional journalists and Web surfers alike as they learn from the mistakes of the past and set out for transformational change in the future.

For more information about Saizan and her blog, log onto www.hurricane-katrina.org. If you are interested in interviewing Saizan about her experience and her blog, call Rebecca Rainer at 225-892-7316.

About Margaret Saizan

Margaret Saizan (www.margaretsaizan.org) is a new media publisher, personal/organizational coach, and community activist. The Baton Rouge, La. native became a blogger during the largest natural disaster in U.S. history – Hurricane Katrina. A graduate of Newfield Network, one of the best regarded international coach training schools, Margaret focuses on empowering leadership and facilitating action during transition, crisis, and disaster as the pathway to new vision. www.hurricane-katrina.org and Big Vision Media aspire to ignite wise action, new vision and positive change through transformational media.