



# Press Release

August 30, 2006

## **USCIS REMEMBERS KATRINA**

*Commitment of Employees Allowed Work to Continue*

**NEW ORLEANS, LA** – One year ago, shortly after the waters receded, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) employees rushed into the storm damaged USCIS New Orleans District Office and rescued the immigration files of more than 2000 people. The files, representing months of paperwork and effort, were successfully recovered enabling USCIS to continue its day-to-day operations on behalf of the people of the Gulf Coast.

Today, while the area is still fighting to rebuild, the USCIS New Orleans District office is running at full speed. The underlying story of the past year, however, is that the work of the New Orleans office never really stopped.

Stella Jarina, Director of the USCIS New Orleans District, recalls that the scattering of people and files made it difficult to review cases, contact applicants, update records or even schedule interviews. “It was a monumental task,” recalled Jarina. “We had to find a way to reach our clients.” Even if the communication channels were open, New Orleans’ immigrant population was spread throughout the United States. “It took a special effort by our officers and the U.S. Postal Service to locate each of our customers and explain to them how to get their cases moving,” said Jarina. “At the same time, many of our officers had also been evacuated, had lost their homes and belongings, and were doing their work from neighboring states.”

Less than ten days after the storm hit, USCIS employees turned tragedy into triumph and began working from a temporary location in Jackson, Mississippi where officials answered questions, offered guidance and hosted a naturalization ceremony for residents affected by the storm. These actions were a tangible indication that the USCIS commitment to helping immigrants pursue their individual American dreams would continue, despite the surrounding destruction.

Later, it became apparent that Katrina had completely destroyed the old New Orleans District Office. On June 5, USCIS moved into a new “smarter” New Orleans District Office located at 2424 Edenborn Avenue, Suite 300 in the Metairie. The USCIS officers at the new facility handle more than 100 immigration interviews every week and see 125 customers for personal appointments.

– USCIS –

On March 1, 2003, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) became one of three former INS components to join the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. USCIS is charged with fundamentally transforming and improving the delivery of immigration and citizenship services, while enhancing the integrity of our nation’s security.