

# > THE PORT POLICE TEAM IN NEW ORLEANS

## Harbor: A Home on Wheels

Lt. Michael Graychik of the Port Police lead a team of four Port Police officers on a care package mission on the grandest scale: They delivered a mobile shelter to their colleagues at the beleaguered New Orleans Harbor. The New Orleans officers hadn't been home in three weeks when help arrived from Los Angeles. At press time, the Port's mobile shelter was still on duty in New Orleans. The Port Police team – which also included Sgt. Mike Capodanna, Senior Lead Officer Ben Cobos and Officer Dave Yocham – also performed an assessment of the New Orleans Harbor.

In addition, the Port Police Officers Association passed the bat and raised several thousand dollars, which the Port Police foursome delivered to the offices in New Orleans upon their arrival.

Lt. Graychik was interviewed by Alive! at the Port of Los Angeles Cruise Terminal. — Ed.

## An Interview with Lt. Michael Graychik

**Alive!:** What's your title with Port Police?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Lieutenant. I am over the Counterterrorism Section, and that includes hazardous materials unit, the canines, sea marshals and the dive team. And then also I do some things with homeland security grants and emergency preparedness and anything kind of homeland security related.

**Alive!:** Were you asked to assist in the Katrina efforts because of your emergency preparedness position or how did that come about?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Yes, yes.

**Alive!:** Where did that request come from?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** It came from Chief Ron Boyd of the Port Police. My role was to equip the vehicle and to transport the vehicle to New Orleans. And then while at New Orleans, our mission was to lend the vehicle to them for a definitive period of time. It could be one month, it could be three months. We don't have a definitive closing date, but we're going to get it back, you know, within a short period of time. Also while there part of my mission was to do a survey on the damage and see what type of efforts they had to go through to reopen their port after the hurricane hit and survey the damage.

**Alive!:** It was really a two-fold mission.

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Yes, correct.

**Alive!:** Are the ports similar?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** It's a very different environment there. They have the Mississippi River, so their port is linear. It goes in a line that follows the river. And here our port is a very large complex, and our port is divided up into really two parts: the port of L.A. and the port of Long Beach. It's one giant complex but there's two entities as well as a federal entity, which is the Coast Guard, that has oversight in the port of L.A. and Long Beach.



The Port Police Mobile Shelter is ready for occupancy in front of the New Orleans Harbor Police Station.

**Alive!:** Did FEMA call you in or did the New Orleans Port call you in?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** It was a direct call from the Port of New Orleans to the Port of Los Angeles police.

**Alive!:** How did they choose the Port of Los Angeles?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** It's my understanding that their chief and my chief know each other from the American Association of Port Authorities.

**Alive!:** So it was really a friend calling a friend for help.

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Yes.

**Alive!:** What was your assessment of the port?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** We arrived at the port about three weeks after the hurricane, and the port was operational. It was limited but almost fully operational. They had recovered fairly quickly. The power had been out for three weeks and it was just coming online when we arrived. They had been using emergency generators to power their police station. The sewer lines were still down; they had no fresh water. FEMA was delivering food as well as water to them.

The port had 19 officers that were homeless. They had just received two travel trailers from FEMA and then they had received our mobile shelter so they were in a position where they could house most of the 19 officers that were left homeless in the wake of the hurricane. When we arrived, we handed the vehicle over to them. They were very appreciative. They were in dire straits as far as housing facilities go and there were 19 of them that are homeless so they were pretty much in dire straits in that respect.

**Alive!:** For three weeks they were homeless?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** For three weeks, yes. And they gave us a tour of the city where we got to see all the hurricane damage, where the levee broke and just completely devastated that community. Then we saw some of the other communities where the buildings were standing because the water came up much slower in those neighborhoods. But there were other issues like crude oil that had come from a ruptured storage tank and had just completely surrounded this one neighborhood. So all the homes and streets and yards had a certain level of crude oil in them. And then there were a lot of other hazardous materials that were in the soil there.

**Alive!:** Did you get in the water yourself?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** When we were there the streets were basically dry at that point.

**Alive!:** Tell me about this vehicle that you let them borrow.

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** It came from a company called Four Winds. It's called a Fun Mover, and it's a 34-foot super C class RV-type vehicle. The Harbor Department purchased it and then outfitted it as a shelter and named it a mobile shelter. The department took all the fancy graphics off the side, and put up the City graphic. Then the Harbor Department's carpenter shop built six bunk beds to go in the back. The back portion of it is a garage. In its civilian use it's for storing motorcycles or quads or some type of off-road vehicle. The garage was outfitted with the three sets of bunk beds. And then the forward portion is the living quarters, where you have a couch, a dinette, a kitchen, a full bathroom and a shower, and the driving compartment is attached to that.



Port Police employees Bill Hill, Mike Capodanno, Mike Graychik and Dave Yocham load the Mobile Shelter before leaving for New Orleans.

# > HOMECOMING

## LAFD SWIFT WATER TEAM & USAR TEAM

The week of Sept. 12, the City threw two homecoming parties for the returning Swift Water Team and USAR Team members. Families, friends and guests were treated to words of congratulations and welcome home from a number of speakers, including Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Councilmember Wendy Greuel, Fire Chief Bill Bamattre, Chief Deputy Andrew Fox, LAFD Community Liaison Officer Lou Roupoli and Swift Water Team Leader Jack Wise. Here are some excerpts. — Ed.



Lou Roupoli, Community Liaison Officer, LAFD.

**Lou Roupoli:** "They have been given a mission to go where few are willing. They've seen the devastation and calamity in the last couple of weeks of Hurricane Katrina and have provided public safety in its highest regard. Their dedication to mission and country far surpasses all expectations. With the support from our mayor, the city council, our team was rapidly assembled and deployed into the region impacted by Hurricane Katrina. We're here today to welcome them home and reunite them with their families, friends and coworkers."

**Antonio Villaraigosa:** "I get to do this a second time. I was at the airport a couple hours ago to meet these men. I was here to wish 70 Urban Search and Rescue team members that went to the Gulf States as well. And I can tell you, there are a few moments, as mayor, where



From left: Debbie Garner; Frank Garner, 28 years; and mom, Ruth Garner.



Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

you're prouder than to acknowledge the heroism and the great work and sacrifice of these men who are here today.

"And I want to express to you and your families ... It was nice getting to greet you as you got off the plane but to watch you interact with your families and your children and your wives and your friends here, you can't help but realize that this was a sacrifice. Not just for you but for your children and your families, your parents, who were obviously worried while you were gone and wondering what was going on as they saw the many faces of grief and devastation over the last few weeks. We salute your families as well and thank you for your sacrifices. These men worked with the L.A. County Fire Department and rescued over 525 hurricane victims. Can you believe that? 525 people.

"We couldn't be prouder. You all know that they had to face very, very difficult and arduous conditions. We heard about it, we read about it, we saw it on TV. This was hard work and this took great skill and competence. We have the best, the finest people anywhere in the world. Many of them were in New York and they've gone to every major incident and we're so proud of them.

"This was an act of magnanimity and humanity, an opportunity for us, as Angelenos, to reach out to people almost on the other side of the continent with people that were in need. And the fact that we were able to do this with such success makes me so proud as mayor to welcome you all home, to say thank you and to say to you that you deserve a few days of rest with your families."



Councilwoman Wendy Greuel.

**Wendy Greuel:** "I'm so pleased to have station 88 in my district. It's one of the best in the City of Los Angeles.

"I want to add my congratulations. These firefighters are Los Angeles' heroes. What we now know across the country is that they're heroes for everyone and they're heroes for those of you, your family. Each day, when they leave to go to work, you know that they're going to help someone, whether it be to save their life or help them in some other way. And we are just so proud of what they've done. When you see the signs down here that say, "We love you," "We missed you," we know what a great sacrifice it was for you to allow your family members to go out to help others. I know that their experience was one they will never forget.

"And, hopefully here in the City of Los Angeles, we will learn from some of the challenges that they faced in New Orleans so that we can make sure, when we have another disaster, and, God willing, that won't happen, but our Fire Department has been the lead when we've had issues of the 1994 earthquake and others that have been in the City of Los Angeles.

"I wanted to be here to say thank you to the families and particularly thank you to the firefighters who make us all so very proud. Thank you."

**Jack Wise:** "I'm quite honored to be called the leader of these gentlemen that you see behind us here. They are truly specialists and they are truly



Family members offer a warm welcome home.



Fathers like Mr. Cordobes are excited for the return of their sons (Robby Cordobes, LAFD) as well.



From left: Tammy and Jesse Franco, LAFD, who left with the Swift Water Team Aug. 29, the day before Tammy's birthday; and Jesse's dad (also named Jesse), an LAFD Inspector.

# HURRICANE KATRINA RELIEF EFFORT: CITY HEROES

## Alive! Special Section

### LAFD SWIFT WATER TEAM <



Liz Bammatre, wife of LAFD Chief Bill Bammatre, being welcomed by the mayor.



Battalion Chief Jack Wise, a leader of the Swift Water Rescue Team Leader.

the elite of the elite. We've grown together, as a team, from its inception back in '92 and the people that you see back here are the forefront of that. I want to thank, from every individual on the Swift Water Team, the City Council, the Mayor, for your support through the years and your continued support in this effort. Also, the Fire Chief, Chief Bammatre, Chief Fox, for all the support you've given this team and the confidence that you've instilled in us by allowing us to go and help others in need, just like you've welcomed those that have come to our times of need.

"I also want to thank, for the team, all those that are out here in the crowd. The people at DPS ... all those that made calls to our people, 'til late at night, to our families, to re-ensure that they were being taken care of. That is so heart-warming to us, knowing that they were keeping up to date, that if they had problems, if they had needs, that they would handle those. I can't thank you enough for that. It was so reassuring for our members to know that, to allow them to get in theater and to perform those acts that we're talking about here. It took us that one less stress off of our mind.

"Words don't describe what the [firefighters] were going through and they kept going in and in and in, time after time after time, with little sleep, to help those people out. These are truly the heroes back here and I thank you all for allowing us to do that. That makes us feel good. This is what we train for and I'm at a loss for words, but thank you very much." ■



Mission accomplished, so it's time to celebrate at the USAR Team homecoming event.



Helen Kitahata (Tommy Kitahata's mom) and Robert Larios, Club Director of Communications and Marketing.



Debra Tosch, Executive Director of the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation



Craig White, LAFD, with his daughter, Korbin.



From left: Shane Wise; Jack Wise, 25 years, Battalion 12; and Kelly Martinez.



Craig White and family being interviewed by Channel 9 News, from left: Makenna, Craig, Riley and Tori. When asked about what he would like to share with other City employees, Craig said, "Be thankful for what you have, and realize how fast things can go away because those people lost everything. When we got there, there were people still on rooftops, high and dry on the freeways."

What's the best thing about being back? "These guys, right here!" When asked what they miss most about their dad, Craig's kids said, "Helping with their homework, going to soccer games and just being there for us."



The Cordobes family, from left: Corby; Ashley; Robby Cordobes, Fire Station 90, 17 years; Christopher; and wife, Laurie

When asked what they missed most about their Dad, the kids said, "Going to our football games and helping with the homework." Robby summed up his New Orleans experience by saying, "It was catastrophic, with all the water flooding through the area. It wasn't just one break, it was three different breaks. There were thousands of homes under water, a lot of multiple deaths and a lot of people left homeless."



Tommy Kitahata and his family. Tommy works out of Fire Station 3, downtown. He's been with the LAFD for 17 years.



The USAR Team homecoming helped this LAFD dad connect with this child.



It's all smiles at the USAR Team homecoming.



The USAR Team homecoming meant hugs all around.



The USAR Team homecoming generated high-wattage smiles.

Glenda Richardson, LAPD and Club Member, wrote this poem as a personal tribute to the survivors of Hurricane Katrina. Glenda is a native of Louisiana and has a daughter away at Grambling State University in Louisiana. "I just felt compelled to share this with fellow members." Thank you, Glenda. — Ed.

## LOSS

(In the wake of Hurricane Katrina)

A sense of loss is what they feel  
Look what they've been through with this ordeal  
A disaster that compares to no other  
It separated husbands from wives  
And children from mothers.  
Strength will come, because they survived  
And after the hurt, they're still alive.  
Some lost everything  
Except the clothes on their back.  
We can't imagine a loss like that.  
There are no words to take the pain away  
It's a thing called time, that will take its place.  
Many will regroup and get back on track  
And other won't ever recover  
Or even bounce back.  
We hope they stay strong in their belief  
And not get consumed in their grief.  
Try to dust off the clouds covered in gray  
And keep the good memories to guide the way.  
Our prayers go out to all the survivors in their time of need.  
Helping where we can, so they can proceed.  
Survivors,  
Please remember the smiles  
And the little things that make life worthwhile.

By Glenda Richardson  
LAPD Communications Division

# HURRICANE KATRINA RELIEF EFFORT: CITY HEROES

## Alive! Special Section

### THE PORT POLICE TEAM IN NEW ORLEANS <

**Alive!** The Port purchased it how long ago?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Around the 17th of September, approximately.

**Alive!** It was brand new.

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Brand new; yes, just purchased it.

**Alive!** Was this its first official duty?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** This was it – first official duty.

**Alive!** Did you drive it down there by yourself?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** No, there was a team of four. Our mission was mainly to outfit the vehicle with the equipment and supplies it would need to house a number of officers for an extended period of time, and then equip it with the regular RV maintenance type equipment like water hoses, the sewer hoses, water pressure regulator, all the different necessities that you would have in an RV. And then we outfitted it with bedding, sheets and towels.

**Alive!** Did you live in the vehicle?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** While we drove there we did. And when we arrived, we arrived early in the morning. Before went into New Orleans we stopped in Baton Rouge at a KOA [campground] and we dumped its sewer lines, cleaned it up, and filled it up with water so that when we pulled in to New Orleans it would be all ready to go, full of fresh water, empty sewer tanks and all that.

**Alive!** Did they give you entrance to the city?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** We needed a police escort to get in. This was just prior to Hurricane Rita hitting, and the city had been evacuated again. They had a checkpoint set up along the freeway and the harbor police met us in Baton Rouge and escorted us into the city.

**Alive!** How long did you stay in New Orleans?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** We just stayed overnight. We arrived on a Tuesday morning and stayed there all day Tuesday and half the day on Wednesday. We arrived on Sept. 21st, and we left on the 23rd.

It was a quick trip. It took us about 35 hours to get there.

**Alive!** How did you get back?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** We flew back.

**Alive!** From New Orleans?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** New Orleans airport. It had just opened.

**Alive!** You flew commercial?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Yes. We flew commercial.

**Alive!** I didn't realize they had scheduled flights down there.

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** They did. That was actually that was the first day American Airlines was operating in New Orleans. We flew out on American, so we were lucky.

**Alive!** What was the airport like?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Pretty quiet. There weren't that many people there because the town had been evacuated already. And the only people in the city were military, police, fire and public utilities. So there weren't a lot of civilians there. It was mainly those folks.

**Alive!** Did you need any special permission to be in the airport?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** No. There were checkpoints set up throughout the city, and we passed through checkpoints. But we were in a police vehicle and the driver had the official FEMA-approved ID card to get through. They drove us around everywhere.

**Alive!** Those guys had been homeless for three weeks.

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Yes, they'd been homeless for three weeks.

**Alive!** They must have been awfully glad to see you.

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** They were very appreciative of us getting there.

**Alive!** What were your reactions when you saw everything? This is still three weeks afterwards, but was the city still pretty devastated?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** It was. I was amazed at the scale of the entire disaster site. We drove around for half the day. We were out for about four hours, and we never saw the same ground twice. I was just completely amazed of the size, the magnitude of the devastation.

The neighborhoods where the levee broke, those houses were just completely destroyed. And somebody mentioned before that it looked like an atomic bomb went off, and that's what it looked like. There was literally no structure standing, just piles of debris. And then in the neighborhoods that were farther away from that where the water wasn't rushing, where it just calmly rose, those neighborhoods were all covered in river mud, and the houses were all boarded up. It was kind of eerie because most of those areas were complete neighborhoods, but they were covered in river mud and they had been underwater for several weeks. Those houses had been soaked and saturated with river water and other contaminants for several weeks. I don't know if those houses will ever be inhabitable again.

**Alive!** Are you going to go back and drive the vehicle back here?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** I don't know. I'm not sure what the arrangements are to bring it back yet. It's possible they may drive it back or we may fly somebody out there to go pick it up.

**Alive!** What are you going to do with it, when you get it back?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Once we get it back, we'll use it for ourselves. But it'll be part of the emergency vehicle fleet for the harbor in the event that there's a disaster here.

**Alive!** Were you proud that you were representing the City of Los Angeles in this effort?

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** It was a real good feeling to be able to deliver the vehicle to them in their time of need. It was a very good feeling. And along with the vehicle, the Port Police Officers Association donated several thousand dollars to them. Knowing that we were going, the officers passed a hat around and they collected several thousand dollars, which the association handed over to them when we got to New Orleans. Senior Lead Dan Cobos was in charge of handing over the money to them.

**Alive!** That's that's really nice .

**Lt. Michael Graychik:** Yes, it was a good feeling. ■



The Los Angeles Port Police Team surveys the devastation of the Ninth Ward near where the levee broke.



A view down a street in the Ninth Ward.



New Orleans Harbor Police Detective Glenn Smith tells Los Angeles Port Police Officer Dave Yocham about Glenn's boat rescues in this neighborhood of New Orleans.



Los Angeles Port Police Officer Dave Yocham loads supplies into the Mobile Shelter.



Los Angeles Port Police Lt. Mike Graychik returns to the survey vehicle after visiting the New Orleans Convention Center.



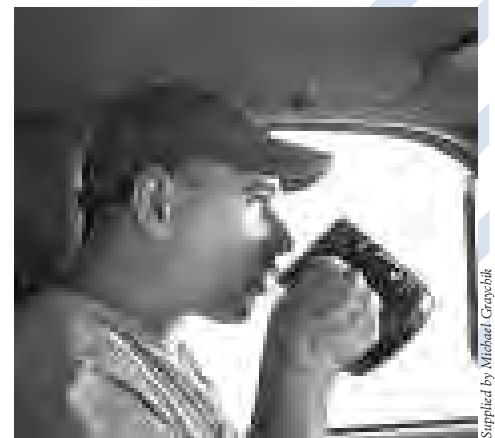
Destruction in a neighborhood near the Ninth Ward. The Los Angeles Port Police Team took this picture approximately three weeks after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans.



A military Humvee on patrol, enforcing the evacuation order in the Ninth Ward.



Two tug boats left high and dry on the banks of the Mississippi River from the Hurricane Katrina storm surge.



Los Angeles Port Police Lt. Mike Graychik takes his driving shift and drinks plenty of coffee.



The Los Angeles Port Police pass a milestone as they cross the state line from Texas into Louisiana en route to New Orleans.