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JOSEPH C. MCGRATH ON HELP AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA

## **Kansas City, thanks for open arms and big hearts AS I SEE IT**

By Joseph C. McGrath



McGrath

A team of pros exist in Kansas City. I call them the Kansas City Angels.

They go by names like Kay, Connie, Mike, Ellen, DeeDee, Jeff, Elbo and Marcie, Tim and Cheryl, Laura and Ken, Kyle and David.

They are mayors and mothers, doctors and brothers, but all are angels. These angels are you, Kansas City, an integral part of what makes this city the heart and soul of America.

Nearly one year ago, August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit and my staff relocated to this city. These angels consoled, fed, clothed and housed hundreds of our people who had no place to go, helping us rebuild shattered lives and dreams.

Kay came into our lunchroom in the basement of Union Station 10 days after Katrina. We were feeding our families. With the banks destroyed, we could not buy food, not even with an ATM card.

With quiet, calm compassion, Kay touched everyone at each table, leaving most in tears. She told them that Kansas City welcomed them into its arms and would do everything it could to help them become a part of the city.

Not knowing whom Kay was, I walked over and introduced myself. When I asked for a name, she said, "I'm Kay, Kay Barnes." When I asked why she had dropped by, she said, "I'm the mayor of Kansas City, and it's important to me that you people feel welcome."

Connie was ready to close her bank, late on a Friday afternoon, when I walked in. I was a disheveled stranger from out of town, needing help.

By Monday, she had in her office educators to register children for school, religious leaders to deal with the sorrows of the moment, and many others with hearts open.

Ken called after he heard about our family with a handicapped child. The family's car, house and earthly

possessions were drowned by Katrina. "Just pay the Missouri tax on this handicapped-equipped van and it is yours," he said, dissolving our family to tears.

Ellen and DeeDee rounded up caravans of cars filled with clothes, cribs and toys, all donated by men, women and children who simply wanted to help. Mike brought doctors, nurses and medicine to heal our bodies and spirits.

When I could do no more, not even unpack my own things, new neighbors like Marcie unpacked for me.

The kindness of strangers to strangers pulses through this community. Angels abound. How does one say thank you for it all? Simple! Thank you, Kansas City Angels!

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*Joseph C. McGrath is executive vice president of Grantham Educational Corp., an online university that recently relocated to Kansas City.*