



Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

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Activists developing petition for politicians to rethink single regional levee board

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Angela Hill / WWL-TV Reporter

A grass roots effort is building to get Governor Blanco and the legislature to rethink creating a single regional levee board, as many Katrina-born political activists stand in the front lines of a movement demanding change.

Don't be fooled by the sight of five women seated at a kitchen table. What looks like an ordinary group of housewives and female professionals is really the birth of a major citizen organization that's preparing to take Baton Rouge and Washington by storm.

"Let those politicians know that they are not going to let them ramrod down our throats. We have had it with politics up to here," Kerrigan said.

Kerrigan's passion was born out of the legislative vote against the creation of one levee board run by experts.

"67 people voted either 'no' or abstained and we were the laughing stock of the nation," said Ruthie Frierson, who came up with the idea to form a citizens group to fight back.

"The reason we are driven to do it is because businesses have left New Orleans and until the levee boards are consolidated and we can prove to the federal government that we have no patronage. We need the federal support; we need the money," Frierson said.

And thus 'Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans' was born.

"We had about 120 people at the meeting the other day and we started from there. Since then we have about 200. Today, I sent out 75 emails and within minutes I had 50 back," said activist Barbara Bush.

The others see Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans as the voice of thousands of people who were scared, frustrated, depressed and want to do something to keep the city alive.

With more and more people joining them daily they are getting petitions signed which will be given to each of the legislators who voted against the single levee proposal as well as the governor.

Frierson calls on Blanco to be a leader.

"Put it on the agenda in January," she said. "You must put it on the agenda in January, or we are going to lose our city we are going to lose our community."

This citizens' movement has already moved from the kitchen table. Its' next meeting will be here at the St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church on December 8 at 9 a.m. The

women said anyone who is passionate about the survival of this community is invited, regardless of age or ethnicity.

Patti Lapaye spent the day getting signatures in St. Bernard while another member was working St. Tammany.

"I have never spoken to a legislator before in my life or called. And just by phone calls I learned so much and learned we can make a difference," Lapaye said.

Like so many these women returned to New Orleans, mourning the loss of what it was. They said they have gone through feelings of helplessness and feeling angry; but now they believe is the time to take action.

"We ain't the Big Easy. We're the 'Big Tough,'" Karrigan said.

