

This article has been forwarded to you from [Complinet](#) by [stuart.gittleman@complinet.com](mailto:stuart.gittleman@complinet.com)

**Message:**

## Compliance officers find it's satisfying but not easy to help rebuild The Big Easy

**Apr 21 2008** [Stuart Gittleman](#)

If you think integrating operations and business management with compliance functions has nothing to do with building homes, painting, and planting flowerbeds, some attendees at a recent conference in New Orleans might disagree.

Compliance professionals and chief financial officers attending the event, which was sponsored by Ascendant Compliance Management, came to The Big Easy a day before the conference started to do some work for which the results were concrete and immediate. Ascendant is led by Jacqueline Hallihan-Merwin and Jon Higgins, formerly the founders and chief executive and chief operating officer, respectively, of National Regulatory Services.

Ascendant is so new that its web site will not go live until mid-May, but that did not mean a delay for either business or related activities. Staffer Mike Mirantz helped arrange for attendees to work on projects in the city's Upper Ninth Ward, which Hurricanes Katrina and Rita largely destroyed in the summer of 2005. The devastated neighborhood, which had been home to many lower-income residents, was barely touched until New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity stepped in.



NOLA: hammering away at compliance

NOAHH is affiliated with Habitat for Humanity International, a non-profit group that has built more than 250,000 homes worldwide. In the aftermath of Katrina and Rita, NOAHH has been rebuilding damaged homes and plans to build 1,500 new homes in Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes over the next five years.

A current project is pairing with musicians Harry Connick Jr and Branford Marsalis to create Musicians' Village, which will be a community of homes as well as teaching and recital facilities for the musicians who make the city unique. Many of the jazz, blues and other genre performers who play for love more than money called the Upper Ninth home before being displaced. Others would stop by, pre-Katrina, to connect with their roots by hearing the music as it has been played by and for performers rather than for tourists.

### Compliance cares

Forty volunteers, including Ascendant employees and conference attendees, sponsors and speakers, split into teams to work on three separate projects around Musicians' Village. The first team worked on new Musicians' Village homes in various states of completion, doing framing, insulation, siding, caulking and painting. A second team fixing a damaged home spoke with its owners about what it was like to live through the hurricane and the floods. And a third team planted gardens and trees around newly-constructed homes and helped clean up debris that the deadly waters had left.

"This was really such a tremendous experience," said Mirantz. "Witnessing the devastation left by Hurricane

Katrina is a humbling experience. The fact that many of the neighborhoods are in no better shape today than the days after the water receded is really overwhelming. Being able to give back in a small way was very rewarding and we would like to thank all our volunteers."

"I thought it was a great idea to kick off the week and get acquainted with other compliance professionals outside of our more typical roles," said volunteer Julie T Thomas, a mutual fund compliance manager at Ohio National Financial Services. "I learned how it feels to be exhausted by a hard day of physical labor and at the same time feel exhilarated knowing that I was able to help in some small way. I learned that we can all make a difference with a little effort and a lot of heart. I learned all of that and more," she added, "before the conference even started! Thanks for the experience."

This is not the first time Hallihan-Merwin, Higgins and crew have held a compliance conference in New Orleans and used the city's unique qualities to make the event memorable. As *Complinet* has reported, a conference the year before the hurricanes featured a march down Bourbon Street led by a brass band accompanied by costumed revelers. This year's organized give-back to the host city, however, made the event special for the city's residents as well as for the conference attendees.

Author Biography:

[Free Trial](#)

[About us](#)

---

Complinet services are available for a free trial via [www.complinet.com](http://www.complinet.com)  
If you have any complaints please [contact us immediately](#).

---