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TESS MONAGHAN, 24

Director, Build Now

Build Now was not Tess Monaghan's idea. Her father William, a New York architect and contractor who had grown up in New Orleans, started the nonprofit to help middle-income families build new houses on lots they own to replace those damaged by Hurricane Katrina, particularly in Gentilly. He drew up plans for several styles and sizes of homes that were designed to be energy efficient and affordable and started building a model home to show prospective customers.

Monaghan, however, made Build Now a business when her father finally talked her into leaving her management consulting job in New York to move to New Orleans last year.

"When I came down, all Build Now was was a house 80 percent complete and some house plans," she says. "I made the idea into a workable business." The nonprofit now has a staff of two — Monaghan and Sales Director Nikki Najiola — and provides clients with house plans, a contractor and someone to walk through all the permitting and building steps, all for a guaranteed price.

"We're just providing one solution," says Monaghan, who over the past four months has begun work on five new homes. She estimates Build Now needs to sell 15 houses a year to be viable. "I'm amazed at the number of steps that need to be coordinated to get [a house built in New Orleans]," she says. "One of the main reasons that progress on the building of single-family homes is so slow is that people are overwhelmed. Now they can hand the whole job over to us.

"It's been incredibly worthwhile. In New York I was working for a huge corporation. It's been great down here experiencing a totally different way of life and being able to help families. One guy we're building a house for is now living out of his car. It's wonderful to be able to help someone on that level." — *Graves*



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