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Organization helps man, 95, come back home

Adams was displaced after Hurricane Katrina

By Timothy Martinez
Contributing writer

For the first time in almost five years, Edward Adams was home.

On a calm March morning, just a few days after his 95th birthday, Adams arrived in a minibus at his brand new house at 1931 St. Maurice Ave. in the Lower 9th Ward.

“Thank God almighty,” Adams said when he stepped off the bus. “I’m so happy to be home.”

His long journey home began after he was forced to take shelter in the Superdome during Hurricane Katrina. He had to stay in Texas for several months after the storm. Then, he stayed with a relative in Vacherie.

That’s when Adams took the initiative to begin rebuilding his house.

“The first couple of times he came to meet with us, his cousin drove him in, and we were able to sign a contract,” said Tess Monaghan, director of operations at Build Now.

Build Now is a nonprofit organization aimed at helping people whose homes were destroyed during the storm by contracting construction for new and sustainable houses. Rather than focus on building in a specific location, the organization builds houses all over the city. They have 12 homes in New Orleans with 10 more under way in areas including Hollygrove and Lakeview.

Adams and his cousin were in communication with Habitat for Humanity but were told that they didn’t build in the Lower 9th Ward, so they were referred to Build Now, Monaghan said.

“He signed a contract with us in late 2008 so construction on the house started



Edward Adams smiles in his new home in the Lower 9th Ward.

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MATTHEW HINTON / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

House built in familiar style

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in early 2009," Monaghan said. "The house was finally finished in June 2009."

The type of house he selected from Build Now is called the Napoleon and is in the style of a traditional New Orleans shotgun. There are 14 different models, each designed with New Orleans architecture and energy-efficient appliances.

"What we wanted to do for the residents who lost their home was create something comfortable and familiar," Monaghan said. "Why should we challenge them with houses that look like spaceships?"

Despite being eager to return home when the house was completed in June, Adams fell down during the summer. He was on the floor for two or three days before someone discovered him.

As a result, Adams was taken to a home in the Donaldsonville so he could receive medical care and 24-hour assistance. His real home, he said, was never far from his mind.

His weakened condition required him to be in a wheelchair until he recovered, which posed a challenge. Adams specifically chose to have his new house elevated to the maximum height of 8 feet so he would not have to

climb up into the attic to escape future flooding.

To accommodate Adams' state, the Build Now workers made special arrangements to install an elevator on the side of the front porch. Project coordinator Clara Flores helped get him a couch, table and hospital bed.

"I've always kept in close contact with him and we tried to get him any little thing he needed, like small furniture," Flores said. "Normally we wouldn't do that but with this specific customer, we've gone out to see if places will donate things or we'd make small purchases."

With his house finally equipped to suit his needs, Adams was able to move back to the city he lived in since he was 10 years old. He said he was surprised at the condition of other houses in the Lower 9th Ward.

Across the street from his new two-bedroom house is an empty lot. He said all his neighbors were probably gone, but he still remained optimistic.

"It looks like all the people my age died already, so I'll just have to go make some new friends," he said. "When my foot gets better, I'm going to go walk up and down Canal Street like I used to."

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Timothy Martinez is a contributor to The Times-Picayune.