



Homespun protest signs outside a tattoo shop in Larose.

STAR-TELEGRAM/JOHN GRAVOIS

## Trying to hang on in the face of uncertainty

**The physical signs of the spill are bad; the intangible scars on people who've lost their jobs are worse.**

By JOHN GRAVOIS  
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My father-in-law grew more animated the closer we got to Cocodrie, excited to show off how well that area of south Louisiana was coping — not with the massive BP oil spill's slow-moving attack on the fragile wetlands, but with the continuing recovery from Hurricanes Katrina and Gustav.

He pointed out house after house that had been refurbished and lifted — placed 14 feet above the ground on stilts to meet the

government's terms to be allowed in the perpetually storm-threatened area along the Louisiana coast.

Katrina was supposed to be the knockout punch that would all but clear Cajuns and others out of a region where wetlands are disappearing at a rate of a more than a football field an hour. But it didn't.

"We've come a very long way," my father-in-law said. "A lot of people have put everything they had into rebuilding and staying put. I hope it's not all for nothing."

Like many residents of Terrebonne Parish, Lennie Roy has been through more than his share of hurricanes and floods through

the decades. Long-timers are accustomed to the cycles of destruction and reconstruction and the always expensive and never-ending struggle to improve man-made protection from the worst that Mother Nature can throw. They're leery of politicians promising to help and distrustful of government in general.

But they've never felt an impact like the one from the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

I spent the better part of two days last week traveling down the bayous and canals and back roads where I grew up around Houma, in search of tangible signs of the oil spill. You had to go a long way down the bayous — all the way to

the end of the road, basically — to find obvious signs like absorbent boom in the coastal waterways surrounding Port Fourchon and Grand Isle.

Officials said the actual slicks generally remained a few miles offshore and in the barrier islands, although there were spots along the beach in Grand Isle where some oil had washed up. I didn't see any.

The wetlands remain beautiful, the wildlife abundant. For now. You can even get fresh jumbo Gulf shrimp — "if you can take the iodine," said the woman at T-Irv's boat launch in Dulac.

It soon struck me that the fasci-

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A closed seafood store near Larose, La.

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## Spill: The people of Southern Louisiana know how to survive

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nation with physical signs of the oil spill was missing the point.

As President Barack Obama was making his fourth trip to the Gulf of Mexico in the nearly two months since the rig disaster began, the real signs of the spill were all around me in the stories I heard from the people at T-Irv's, the folks working at the BP staging area at the Coco Marina in Cocodrie and the people trying to hang on to their small businesses in Grand Isle.

They all said they'd deliver the same message to the president if given the chance: Stop the leak, hold BP accountable and act quickly to reopen deep-sea drilling and areas of the Gulf now closed to fishing and shrimping.

Much of the coast remains open to sport fishing, but the region's massive shrimping fleet is docked and oyster beds have been hit especially hard by closures. The combined hit to the oil fields and fishing has left thousands out of work.

"It's all about the jobs," said Dennis Knight, a brother-in-law who had joined us on the coastal tour. "If people can't work, I don't know what they're going to do."

A lot of people are trying to make the

best of the circumstances. That means trying to get temporary work from BP and other companies involved in containment and cleanup, trying to rent camps and homes to temporary workers and providing services to temporary workers pouring into the area.

Johnny Glover, who runs CoCo Marina, typically has a thriving summertime business catering to sport fishing and charter boats, but his facility has morphed into one of the several staging areas used by BP and local, state and federal officials dealing with the spill. Hundreds of workers stay at camps and temporary living quarters near the marina.

"People here have been through a lot. They know how to survive, and we're going to make it this time, too," Glover said.

With a hurricane, at least you know when it's coming, when it's gone and when it's safe to rebuild, he said. But with the spill, "You just don't know when it's going to end."

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