

# City & State

## FINAL EDITION

### WAKE • FRANKLIN

Including Raleigh, Apex, Cary, Knightdale, Morrisville, Wake Forest and Granville County

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## Comfort for elderly evacuees

Sandy Wasserman told her husband, Larry, the story Monday night, and they both laughed. A little girl, newly enrolled, thanks to Katrina, at the school where Sandy works, skipped up to her and said, "You probably know me. I've



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been on television."

Sandy wasn't surprised. The girl was cute as a button and lively as could be.

But her remark was a reminder to Sandy and

Larry of the lack of telegenic qualities of the population they serve: the elderly.

"If you're looking for a TV image," said Larry, "it's not an elderly person, sitting in a wheelchair drooling."

Even in the best of times, the Wassermans refer to the elderly as "the forgotten people." But in these, the worst of times, they think it is particularly true. Just Tuesday, the owners of one New Orleans nursing home were charged with multiple counts of manslaughter for failing to evacuate their patients; according to the police, 34 of them died.

That's why Larry and Sandy want to take their ministry, Faithful Friends, out to the Katrina evacuee shelter in West Raleigh.

It's not that the elderly out there have been ignored. Far from it.

But when it comes to bedside manner, the Wassermans have experience that's hard to beat. They say they've been visiting with elderly people for 15 years. (For more about their work, visit [faithfulfriends.org](http://faithfulfriends.org).)

In Florida, where they lived until January, they had a group of helpers, not to mention a large senior citizen population. "There was a nursing home on every corner," Larry jokes. He said they made visits to homes four times a week.

Since January, they've been attending Crossroads Fellowship and trying to get the nursing home effort up and running in Raleigh. It is pure charity. Both work full time, Larry as a salesman for a wastewater equipment manufacturer, Sandy at Aldert Root Elementary in Raleigh.

But through their experiences, Larry and Sandy have gleaned some keen insights into the depression and sorrow that can accompany old age.

They know how traumatic even the smallest changes can be for those who are elderly and in poor health.

"These are people who are deeply upset over having to move to a new room," Larry said. So imagine how they might respond to a massive storm; being trapped in the squalid conditions afterward; getting on a plane to a new state, only to find themselves, finally, in a shelter in Raleigh, separated from everything that was familiar. Larry only hopes they've been shielded from some of the news coverage, including the stories about the nursing home deaths.

He recalled one image, of a person in a wheelchair.

"They had just thrown a blanket over him," Larry said, his booming voice choked for a moment. "That person died in that wheelchair, and they just threw a blanket over him. It breaks my heart to think of it."

Still, such stories make him and his wife all the more eager to visit with the elderly survivors evacuated to Raleigh.

So Sunday, after services, the Wassermans hope to win clearance to bring in senior devotional Bibles and something even more precious: a few words of comfort and peace. A reminder that they are not forgotten after all.

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