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## **Two Decades After Katrina, KW Cares Emerges as a National Model of Corporate Relief - Over \$10 Million Directed Into New Orleans Families**

**New Orleans, LA – August 30, 2025** – Twenty years after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, one of the city's most remarkable recovery stories still hasn't been fully told. A nonprofit born inside a real estate franchise has quietly delivered more aid to local families than many of the nation's largest corporations, rewriting the playbook for how business can respond in times of crisis.

KW Cares, established in 2002 by Keller Williams, the world's largest real estate company, poured more than \$5.3 million into Gulf South families after Katrina - the equivalent of more than \$8 million today. For New Orleans, that money translated into more than relief checks. It meant generators that kept entire blocks powered, cars that became community carpools, and gift cards that helped parents get their kids back into classrooms. It meant families who lost everything suddenly had a network reaching across the country, sending not just supplies but hope.

At the time, KW Cares had little more than \$200,000 in reserves. Katrina changed everything. What began as a small hardship fund transformed overnight into one of the most ambitious corporate relief models in America. Two decades later, KW Cares has distributed more than \$66 million worldwide, and Louisiana has been at the center of some of its largest operations. When Hurricane Ida struck in 2021, the nonprofit set up three command centers across the state, delivered more than 1,000 generators, and directed another \$2.7 million into New Orleans families. In some neighborhoods, KW Cares trucks arrived before government agencies.

Much of that legacy traces back to Mo Anderson, Keller Williams' first CEO, who created KW Cares with the conviction that "the higher purpose of business is to give, care, and share." Known as the "Velvet Hammer," Anderson insisted that generosity wasn't a side project - it was central to how a company should be built. Katrina put her philosophy to the ultimate test. The response that followed showed how a corporate culture rooted in care could scale to meet even the largest disasters.

Other corporations have taken note, though none have matched the scope. At a national hardship fund conference, executives from Fortune 100 companies shared that their programs

offered \$1,000, sometimes \$10,000, in relief to employees in crisis. By comparison, KW Cares grants up to \$30,000 per family - and unlike many programs, it isn't one-and-done. If another tragedy strikes, KW Cares steps in again. The funding doesn't come from Wall Street profits but from Keller Williams associates themselves, who contribute a few dollars at the close of every transaction.

"The scale of what KW Cares accomplished here rivals, and in many cases surpasses, what some of the world's largest corporations have done for their own people," said Jeffrey Doussan Jr., Operating Principal of KW New Orleans. "It proves that when you build a system around care, it doesn't just protect your workforce - it helps stabilize entire communities. That's something every business owner in New Orleans should reflect on this week."

Lexi Rodriguez, CEO of KW Cares, added: "What makes this model unique is that it isn't dependent on a single fundraising drive. It's sustainable. Because our associates give a little with every transaction, we're able to respond to every hurricane, every wildfire, every medical crisis. That culture of steady giving is why our impact in New Orleans has been so deep and so lasting."

For those inside KW New Orleans, the impact is personal. Market Center Administrator Holly Freas lost her St. Bernard Parish home to 30 feet of water. "Keller Williams made all the difference in my life, and in my kids' lives," she said. With KW Cares' support, she rebuilt - and went on to serve her office and community for the next two decades.

Founder Jeff Doussan recalls the call he received from Mo Anderson days after Katrina. "Darling, don't worry about a thing," she told him. "We will make sure you don't fail." That promise, he says, was kept - and it gave his office the footing it needed to help families return and businesses reopen.

Team Leader Cody Caudill points out that the generosity has always flowed in both directions. Since 2007, KW New Orleans agents have contributed more than \$200,000 to KW Cares. "We've given more often than most offices, but we've also received more than we deserve," Caudill said. "That's the miracle of KW Cares - the more you give, the more there is for everyone. In this city, that kind of care doesn't just rebuild homes. It rebuilds communities."

Today, KW Cares stands as proof of what a franchise system can achieve when thousands of independent business owners align around a common purpose. With more than 200,000 associates worldwide, Keller Williams is the largest real estate company in the world - and one of the few that can point to a philanthropic arm that often outpaces the giving of America's most recognizable brands.

For business leaders in New Orleans reflecting on the anniversary of Katrina, the takeaway is straightforward: companies that build systems of care aren't just doing the right thing - they're building resilience. They safeguard their people, they strengthen their communities, and they leave legacies that last long after the floodwaters recede. KW Cares offers a case study in what's possible when compassion and scale move in lockstep.

**About KW New Orleans**

[Keller Williams Realty New Orleans](#) has been locally owned and rooted in the city since 1998, making it the only multi-generational brokerage in the market. The company is owned and operated by Jeffrey Doussan, Jr. and continues the use of cutting-edge business models and industry-first technology developed by Keller Williams Realty Inc. - the largest residential real estate firm by volume, units, and agent count in the U.S., North America, and the world. Known for attracting top producers across luxury, resale, and investment, KW New Orleans delivers the tools, leadership, and culture agents need to grow and scale. We're built for agents who want more than transactions—we help them build lasting production, wealth, and freedom.

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