

Toyota Production Techniques Boost Home Reconstruction in New Orleans

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[Shigeki Terashi Biography](#)

[Akinori Saito Biography](#)

[Jamie Bonini Biography](#)

NEW ORLEANS — (March 2, 2012) – Two days before Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, Courtenay LaRoche fled to Texas with her two children. Thinking it may be “just another storm that would blow over,” she packed only two sets of clothes for each family member. It wasn’t enough; her home was destroyed. Now, over six years later, her life is about to change again – only, this time, for the better.

Today, at a press conference, LaRoche told her story – from her nearly rebuilt home in the heart of the city. Her odyssey finally ended, she and her children are about to return home by virtue of a partnership in which Toyota shares its production-system techniques with the St. Bernard Project.

The company has helped St. Bernard Project reduce home rebuilding time by nearly 50 percent, putting residents back into homes faster. In addition, Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America President and Chief Operating Officer Shigeki Terashi presented \$100,000 to further the work of the St. Bernard Project.

“This is a dream come true for me and my family. It has been six long years, but, now, we are finally home,” LaRoche said. “I really appreciate how St. Bernard Project has treated my home, making sure everything is done perfectly. They are thorough with the work they are doing here. The volunteers, the workers, they treat my home like it’s their own. They have such pride in the project; it’s really special.”

The LaRoches are just one of hundreds of families helped by St. Bernard Project, a New Orleans recovery organization. Toyota, through its non-profit arm – the Toyota Production System Support Center (TSSC) – partnered with St. Bernard last June with the intent to help the group make substantial improvements by increasing quality, productivity, safety and reducing customer wait time in the rebuilding of houses.

“Our construction process simply wasn’t as effective as it could have been, and, as a result, we weren’t bringing as many families home,” said Liz McCartney, co-founder and director of construction for St. Bernard Project.

“Using lessons from the Toyota Production System (TPS), we have implemented efficiencies that have significantly reduced construction (lead) time to as little as six weeks. That’s half the time it took us to build some houses prior to our partnership with Toyota. These improvements are making an incredible difference in our ability to rebuild homes for families in the New Orleans area quickly and affordably.”

St. Bernard Project was founded in 2006 by Zack Rosenburg and McCartney, an attorney and teacher, respectively, from Washington D.C., after they saw the tremendous needs in the New Orleans region. Following a month of service in the area, the pair started the nonprofit, focusing on finding a solution to fulfilling the needs expressed by community members.

Many of the St. Bernard clients don’t have the financial means to rebuild their homes and see this organization as the last resort to return to their property. St. Bernard Project utilizes AmeriCorps members and other volunteers, as well as employs returning war veterans to rebuild these homes.

The St. Bernard Project is just one of more than 170 companies or not-for profits that have been aided by Toyota.

“At Toyota, we judge our success not just on the vehicles we make, but, also, on the positive impact we are able to have in local communities across North America,” Terashi said. “With so many nonprofits being asked to do more with less, the need to operate with greater efficiency has become even more vital.”

Since Toyota came on board, St. Bernard Project has seen the following results:

- Time it takes to rebuild a home has dropped from an average of 116 days to 60 days – a 48 percent improvement;
- Amount of houses being rebuilt per month has jumped from 8.6 to 12.8;
- Improved processes: the collaboration has consisted of sharing TPS know-how and working closely with St. Bernard Project’s professional staff, skilled construction supervisors and AmeriCorps members to improve homebuilding efficiencies.

“Before TPS, it was difficult to see problems — which caused wasted time and duplication of work,” said Toyota General Manager Jamie Bonini. “We want to instill a disciplined, but flexible construction model.”

One challenge was to develop a better way to schedule the hundreds of volunteers and construction contractors who work on the houses. While there was no organized system before, today, as you enter St. Bernard Project’s headquarters, “management boards” track everything from volunteer/worker schedules to inventory to status reports on homes being rebuilt.

“This has been such a rewarding experience,” Bonini said. “St. Bernard Project’s mission is incredible – we are proud to be a part of it.”