

# NEW ORLEANS



Martel Neville, a 1999 Coca-Cola scholarship recipient from Philadelphia, carries one of about 20 benches that were built and painted earlier that day.



Mike Drumm from Chicago helps replace a batting cage net. Coca-Cola and its Global McDonald's Division spent about \$150,000 on the restoration.

## TEAM EFFORT

*Workers from Coca-Cola Co. division pitch in to restore a languishing baseball stadium at Pontchartrain Park*



STAFF PHOTO BY CHRIS GRANGER

Two hundred and fifty Coca-Cola Co. employees take to the field Wednesday at Pontchartrain Park to restore the baseball field devastated by Hurricane Katrina's floodwaters.

# Team effort restores N.O. baseball stadium

## *Coca-Cola workers pitch in on recovery*

**By Leslie Williams**

Staff writer

Yoshi Nori Ishii happily endured an assortment of manual labors Wednesday at a long-dormant baseball stadium in the struggling-to-recover Pontchartrain Park neighborhood. Under the bright sun, Ishii clawed through freshly poured red clay for the infield with a rake that occasionally snagged on grass roots buried below.

"It's getting much better," said Ishii, who is from Japan. "Before it was a mess."

"I'm very happy to help," said Ishii, one of 250 employees of the Coca-Cola Co.'s Global McDonald's Division who opted to spend a full day of a five-day convention visit restoring the Wesley Barrow Baseball Stadium.

In one day, the en masse effort transformed the stadium.

Ishii and other Coca-Cola employees from 30 states and more than 100 countries left their convention headquarters at the Ritz-Carlton to saw, dig, rake, paint, scrape, scrub and hammer. They plucked vines from chain-link fences and hauled away debris to the beat of recorded New Orleans music playing in the background.

The voluntary mission started at 9 a.m. and ended about 4 p.m. with the revival of the popular New Orleans Recreation Department baseball stadium that has been used for decades by NORD baseball teams, adult leagues and high school teams. The baseball stadium had been dormant and unkempt since it languished under floodwaters for weeks more than 16 months ago.

"We chose New Orleans out of a world of options," said Jerry Wilson, president of the Global McDonald's Division for Coca-Cola as he worked with others to rebuild the pitcher's mound. "We could have met in Beijing or Madrid."

Wilson said his division chose New Orleans because it could have a great impact, creating a lasting legacy for the community.

In addition to the volunteer labor, the division and Coca-Cola Enterprises spent about \$150,000 on tools, rental equipment, materials and loads of the red clay needed for the infield. The company also installed a huge new scoreboard.

"This stadium is a magnet for a community that needed to be reawakened," said Wilson. "We wanted to give back to the community, to the kids."

Karen Thomas, a spokeswoman for the division, declared the infield ready for play. The city should only have to build the roof over the bleachers, take care of some of the plumbing and electrical work in the locker rooms and fix the lighting for the field, she said.

"It is through partnerships with corporations like the Coca-Cola Co. that NORD is able to return to each community stronger and better," said Larry Barabino Jr., the department's interim director. Mayor Ray Nagin also congratulated the volunteers, saying, "Sites like Wesley Barrow are safe recreation zones for local youth to engage in the productive activities that help them become the leaders of tomorrow."

The field is ready for NORD practices, Barabino said. The city may complete the electrical and plumbing work in the locker rooms by April. Repairs to the roof over the bleachers and the field lights may be finished this summer, he said.