# **Levee breach floods Lakeview, Mid-City, Carrollton, Gentilly, City Park**

A large section of the vital [17th Street Canal](http://topics.nola.com/tag/17th-st-canal/index.html) levee, where it connects to the brand new 'hurricane proof' Old Hammond Highway bridge, gave way late Monday morning in Bucktown after [Katrina](http://www.nola.com/katrina/)'s fiercest winds were well north. The breach sent a churning sea of water coursing across [Lakeview](http://topics.nola.com/tag/lakeview/index.html) and into Mid-City, Carrollton, Gentilly, City Park and neighborhoods farther south and east.

As night fell on a devastated region, the water was still rising in the city, and nobody was willing to predict when it would stop. After the destruction already apparent in the wake of Katrina, the [American Red Cross](http://topics.nola.com/tag/red-cross/index.html) was mobilizing for what regional officials were calling the largest [recovery](http://topics.nola.com/tag/hurricane-katrina-recovery/index.html) operation in the organization's history.

[Police](http://topics.nola.com/tag/nopd/index.html), firefighters and private citizens, hampered by a lack of even rudimentary communication capabilities, continued a desperate and impromptu boat-borne rescue operation across Lakeview well after dark. Coast Guard choppers with search lights criss-crossed the skies.

Officers working on the scene said virtually every home and business between the 17th Street Canal and the Marconi Canal, and between Robert E. Lee Boulevard and City Park Avenue, had water in it. Nobody had confirmed any fatalities as a result of the levee breach, but they conceded that hundreds of homes had not been checked.

As the sun set over a still-churning Lake Pontchartrain, the smoldering ruins of the Southern Yacht Club were still burning, and smoke streamed out over the lake. Nobody knew the cause of the fire because nobody could get anywhere near it to find out what happened.

Dozens of residents evacuated to the dry land of the Filmore Street bridge over the Marconi Canal were stranded between the flooded neighborhood on their right, and the flooded City Park on their left, hours after they had been plucked from rooftops or second-story windows.

Firefighters who saved them tried to request an RTA bus to come for the refugees, but said there was no working communications to do so.

Ed Gruber, who lives in the 6300 block of Canal Boulevard, said he became desperate when the rising water chased he, his wife, Helen, and their neighbor Mildred K. Harrison to the second floor of their home. When Gruber saw a boat pass by, he flagged it down with a light, and the three of them escaped from a second-story window.

On the lakefront, pleasure boats were stacked on top of each other like cordwood in the municipal marina and yacht harbor. The Robert E. Lee shopping center was under 7 feet of water. Plantation Coffeehouse on Canal Boulevard was the same. Hines Elementary School had 8 feet of water inside.

Indeed, the entire business district along Harrison Avenue had water to the rooflines in many places.

Joshua Bruce, 19, was watching the tide rise from his home on Pontalba Street when he heard a woman crying for help. The woman had apparently tried to wade the surging waters on Canal Boulevard when she was swept beneath the railroad trestle just south of Interstate 610. Bruce said he plunged into the water to pull her to safety. He and friends Gregory Sontag and Joey LaFrance found dry clothes for the near-victim and she went on her way in search of a second-story refuge further downtown.

The effect of the breach was instantly devastating to residents who had survived the fiercest of Katrina's winds and storm surge intact, only to be taken by surprise by the sudden deluge. And it added a vast swath of central New Orleans to those already flooded in eastern New Orleans, the [Lower Ninth Ward](http://topics.nola.com/tag/lower-ninth-ward/index.html) and [St. Bernard](http://topics.nola.com/tag/st-bernard/index.html)and Plaquemines Parishes.

Beginning at midday, Lakeview residents watched in horror as the water began to rise, pushed through the levee breach by still-strong residual winds from Katrina.

They struggled to elevate furniture and eventually found themselves forced to the refuge of second floors or, just when most in the neighborhood thought they had been spared.

"It would have been fine, " said refugee Pat O'Brien. "The eye passed over."

But his [relief](http://topics.nola.com/tag/hurricane-katrina-relief/index.html) was short lived, O'Brien said. "It's like what you see on TV and never thought would happen to us. We lost everything, cars, art, furniture, everything."

Scott Radish, his wife Kyle and neighbor Brandon Gioe stood forlornly on their Mound Street porch, where they had ridden out Katrina, only to face a second more insidious threat.

"The hurricane was scary, " Scott said. "All the tree branches fell, but the building stood. I thought I was doing good. Then I noticed my Jeep was under water."

The water had risen knee-deep during the storm, but despite the clearing skies, it had continued to rise one brick every 20 minutes, according to Kyle, continuing its ascent well into the night.

"We were good until the Canal busted, " said Sontag. "First there was water on the street, then the sidewalk, then water in the house."

Officials of the Army Corps of Engineers have contingencies for levee breaches such as the one that happened Monday, but it will take time and effort to get the heavy equipment into place to make the repair. Breach repair is part of the Corps' planning for recovery from catastrophic storms, but nobody Monday was able to say how long it would take to plug the hole, or how much water would get through it before that happened.

In Lakeview, the scene was surreal. A woman hollered to reporters from a rooftop, asking them to call her father and tell him she was OK - although fleeing to the roof of a two-story home hardly seemed to qualify.

At around 5 p.m., almost as if on cue, the battery power of all the house alarms in the neighborhood seemed to reach a critical level all at once, and they all went off, making it sound as if the area was under an air-raid warning.

Two men surviving on generator power in the Lake Terrace neighborhood near the Lake Pontchartrain levee still had a dry house, but they were eyeing the rising water in the yard nervously. They were planning to head back out to the levee to retrieve a vast stash of beer, champagne and hard liquor they found washed onto the levee.

As night fell, the sirens of house alarms were finally silent, and the air filled with a different, deafening and unfamiliar sound: the extraordinary din of thousands of croaking frogs.

Still wondering if he would spend the night on the Filmore Street bridge over the Marconi Canal, Gruber tried to be philosophical.

"I never thought I would see any devastation like this, and I've lived here more than 30 years, " Gruber said. "But at least we have our lives. And that's something."

