

# editor's note



**SO I'M IN A CAB ON THE WAY TO THE AIRPORT TO FLY TO NEW ORLEANS** (more on that later) and the driver reaches the tollbooth. But instead of using the electronic I-Pass transponder that reduces the toll by half and speeds you right along, he rolls down his window and tosses four quarters into the machine.

I expressed my surprise and heard a lengthy monologue on how I-Pass doesn't work and how his friends received duplicate bills and much more. I wasn't that surprised; he was the second cab driver in six weeks to tell me a similar story. Personally, I think they just feared technology and change.

Of course not every cab driver is a Luddite and I doubt that there are any construction professionals who truly are, but I sometimes wonder if some people in the design and construction industries don't feel the same way about change. While some of the resistance to interoperability is legitimate (Who will pay the engineer to actually provide complete design drawings? Who owns the drawings? What are the liability issues?), a lot of it seems to be just plain fear of the new. But Building Information Models are the wave of the future and the smart designers, builders, and owners are embracing them now—and especially on steel projects where CIS/2 translators are readily available. Right now, for the software used to design and detail the majority of projects, the technology exists to cut schedules and costs substantially. The key, of course, is a smart owner or contractor who recognizes the possibilities and is willing to pay a premium for design fees in order to realize even greater savings down the road (read Dave Ruby and Robert Aeck's article on page 28 to learn how this type of benefit is possible on every project when the entire team is willing to work together).

Now more about New Orleans. If you've ever been a tourist in New Orleans, you probably spent most of your time in the French Quarter (I know that's my personal experience). For the most part, that area of the city hasn't changed. The great restaurants are open for business (though it's easier to get in—a plus for tourists though one that will probably disappear soon enough). The beignets are still delicious. And Jackson Square is still beautiful. The bars don't close until the wee hours of the morning and live music is beginning to return (the upcoming Jazz Fest, together with the slow return of conventioners and tourists should speed the process). The biggest difference is the city is dirtier—pre-Katrina, the French Quarter had 52 sanitation workers; now they have 14. But come June, they're supposed to be solving that problem.

If you go 10 to 15 minutes out of downtown, the story is completely different. I had the opportunity to tour Lakeview, a previously beautiful upper-middle-class community of \$350,000+ homes. Despite having seen it on the news, it's still a shock. Miles and miles of devastation, and in most of the community electricity still hasn't been restored. Homes were actually shoved off their foundations. Huge trees were uprooted. Large wrecked boats are strewn about as though a giant child had gotten bored with his playthings. You could see the waterline on many homes where the water had remained at six or seven feet for a full week. And in one spot, we saw there was still leakage coming through the levees.

Almost everyone we talked to had a story to tell and I marveled how everyone could retell their tale with a small smile. The woman who drove us through Lakeview had grown up in the community and talked about her indecision about whether to rebuild and where her youngest child would go to school next year. Another told us about being in labor in downtown New Orleans as the hurricane hit and people were being evacuated. The gentleman who drove us back to the airport had only 37 inches of water in his house for a week, so mostly he needs to replace his electrical system and the walls and floor coverings on the first floor. But a rental property he owned—a brick home—was literally swept away by a tidal surge. Not a brick remained, he reported with a wry smile. We even heard a tragicomic tale of divine justice. One elderly woman returned to her ruined house only to find that her second floor safe had been rifled. Days later, when her kids were helping her clean up and began draining the backyard pool, they found a body—replete with stolen jewelry. In the darkness, the difference between the flooded yard and the pool was obviously indistinguishable to those unfamiliar with the property.

So New Orleans is even more a city of contrasts than ever before. But rather than simply abject poverty adjacent to solid wealth, now it's a division between the undamaged and the devastated. For visitors though, even those who choose a tour of the devastation, New Orleans remains as it ever has: A unique place to visit.

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