

Top hairdressers want to give New Orleans a makeover

Hairdressers Unlocking Hope is helping Habitat for Humanity build 18 homes

By SAMANTHA CRITCHELL

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Hairdressers are nice people, says Vidal Sassoon, one of the most famous hairdressers of all. They're generous, good listeners and they make you look good, he says.

And now some are doing good, too.

Hairdressers Unlocking Hope is a charitable initiative to benefit Habitat for Humanity with the specific goal of building 18 homes this November in St. Tammany Parish, La., which was hit hard during Hurricane Katri-

na.

"Hairdressing is a people business and it's the people's business right now to do something about New Orleans," Sassoon said in a phone interview.

Sassoon, along with Mary Rector-Gable, founder of the industry Web site behindthechair.com, are spearheading the program that has attracted top stylists including Sally Hershberger, Ken Paves, Oscar Blandi, Garren, Ted Gibson, Nick Arrojo and Edward Tricomi.

The stylists are featured in a provocative online awareness

campaign. They appear in body paint on their arms and hands with phrases and images relating to stories they've heard from Katrina victims.

For example, Blandi has red tape painted on his wrists, and "Hell on Earth" is written on Hershberger's arms. Sassoon himself has "orphan" painted on his wrist in gothic-style letters.

Each stylist also holds a key — the nod to their effort to "unlock" a better future.

Starting Wednesday, until Aug. 29, more than 1,500 salons will either donate directly or raise

money from customers — or both — as part of this initiative.

To find a participating salon, visit www.whodoesyourhair.com.

Also, hair-care companies, including Bumble + Bumble, Paul Mitchell Schools, Sport Clips and John Allen Salons, are collectively committed to build a home valued at \$85,000.

Beyond the expected sadness that he felt for the people affected by Katrina, Sassoon said his reason for becoming involved with Habitat for Humanity was personal.

Sassoon recalled how his fami-

ly was evicted when his mother could no longer afford rent on their London apartment and he was forced to live in an orphanage for six years.

When he was reunited with his family and they moved into a place they could call their own, he became keenly aware of the importance of "community," Sassoon, now 79, told The AP.

He'd like to see a salon, which he said is often an integral part of a community, go into St. Tammany Parish. "A salon is a meeting place. It's for social gathering and gossip — that's the fun part."