Ask The Advocate: All about the Restore Louisiana program

How is the Restore LA program for the 2016 flood victims going?

This is a big issue with a lengthy answer from Shauna Sanford, spokeswoman for the Restore Louisiana Task Force, so we're devoting today's entire column to the issue. Here's what Sanford says, edited for space:

Restore Louisiana is composed of multiple programs: Homeowner Assistance Program, Small Business Program, the Neighborhood Landlord and Multifamily Rental Programs, and Infrastructure Enhancement. "So far, the state has received $1.7 billion in federal disaster assistance, of which $1.3 billion has been allocated to help homeowners rebuild their homes. However, the level of unmet need remains at about $2 billion."

"To date, more than 35,000 homeowners have completed the program survey, which is the necessary first step to participating in the program, but we know there are more homeowners who were impacted by the floods who have not filled out the survey. It's critically important for them to do so."

"Homes are being repaired, and homeowners are receiving reimbursement checks for work that has already been completed. More than 16,000 environmental reviews have been completed. All of Phase I and Phase II and nearly all of Phase III homeowners have been invited into the application process."

"The Task Force has approved expanding the program to include help for homeowners who had flood insurance at the time of the disaster but still meet the Phase 1 program requirements (low-to-moderate income families, with an owner who is elderly or has a household member with a disability, whose home is outside the floodplain). As additional resources become available, we will continue to expand the program to serve more families."

Are they wasting money that could go to homeowners on all these ads and doorknockers and administrative costs?

"Federal emergency disaster declarations were issued for 51 of Louisiana's 64 parishes as a result of the 2016 floods. A fraction of the recovery dollars that have been made available are being used on an aggressive public outreach program to educate homeowners on the program. That is necessary with a program of this magnitude, but costs are being kept low. Survivors deserve to be made fully aware of the assistance that's available to them, especially the elderly and disabled who often face the most difficult recovery challenges."

Will there be a deadline?

There is no deadline to participate in the program, at this time. That is subject to change, which is why we are encouraging homeowners to complete the survey as soon as possible. It can be completed in 15 minutes or less. No documentation is required and answers will determine eligibility. It can be accessed online at restore.la.gov, calling (866) 735-2001 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday or visiting one of the four housing assistance centers in Baton Rouge, Hammond, Lafayette or Monroe."