

OPEN LETTER TO OUR FANS IN LOUISIANA AND THE GULF COAST



TOM BENSON WANTS TO RETURN TO NEW ORLEANS.

I WAS BORN IN NEW ORLEANS, WENT TO SCHOOL AT OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA NEAR ST. ROCH PARK IN THE 8TH WARD, ATTENDED ST. ALOYSIOUS HIGH SCHOOL, AND ATTENDED LOYOLA UNIVERSITY. NEW ORLEANS IS MY HOMETOWN.

IT IS MY INTENTION AND GOAL THAT MY GRANDCHILDREN WILL CARRY ON MY LEGACY OF OWNING THE NEW ORLEANS SAINTS. BOTH ARE CURRENTLY AND ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE OPERATION OF THE SAINTS. RITA BENSON LEBLANC IS A KEY EXECUTIVE AND HER BROTHER IS A SAINTS ADVISOR AND BOTH ACT AS DIRECTORS.

THE PAST FEW WEEKS HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT TO SAY THE LEAST. HOWEVER, IN SPITE OF THE DIFFICULTIES, I HAVE MADE AND WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN CONTRIBUTIONS ANNUALLY TO NEW ORLEANS CHARITIES, WHICH IN MY OPINION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER FOR OUR COMMUNITY.

ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS I HAVE REFUSED LUCRATIVE OFFERS TO SELL THE SAINTS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THEIR PRESENCE IN NEW ORLEANS.

HOWEVER, WE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO MOVE OUR OPERATIONS SINCE FEDERAL AND STATE AUTHORITIES TOOK OVER OUR TRAINING FACILITY IN NEW ORLEANS WITHOUT NOTICE OR PERMISSION. THE ONLY OTHER CHOICE WAS TO FORGO THE SEASON.

After reviewing the reports about our team and the abundance of wide-sweeping negative media commentary and columns, I offer this:

NO DECISION HAS BEEN MADE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE TEAM, because no decision has been made about the future of New Orleans. Our city endured one of the worst catastrophes in history and I clearly stated in the days following that it is our desire to be at the table during the rebuilding and revitalization of our city. However, there are many factors that will affect the future of our team, the same factors that will affect the future of many other companies when faced with the decision to return to the city of New Orleans. No one within our organization has offered or made any official comment about what our long term plans are, since the factors that will determine our situation are still unresolved. That is why we have not stated anything publicly, because it is still too early to determine. But my desire is to return to New Orleans.

It must be stated that we and the NFL have made no decision relative to the future of the Saints. It is remarkable that we have been able to continue operating under the circumstances, a testament to our staff and the assistance we have received in San Antonio as well as Baton Rouge.

San Antonio is a city in which I have deep relationships and I am grateful to them for allowing us access to their facilities. We have been displaced, but yet we forge on to represent New Orleans and the region with pride and determination. We have retained nearly 97% of our workforce, many of whom still remain separated from their families.

Our training facilities in New Orleans were utilized by the government for relief efforts. The Superdome has suffered damage that may keep it offline indefinitely. Operating an NFL team requires months of planning and because of that, we need to look at all of the options that are available to our team in the immediate future.

It must be made very clear that the future of our team in New Orleans will be determined by factors that are yet unresolved, such as, economics and facilities, the very issues that we have struggled with prior to Hurricane Katrina.

I am aware that the many comments and speculation coming out of Texas and other places only inflame the emotions of our fans, and rhetoric of the media in New Orleans. Many cities desire an NFL franchise and the politicians of these cities are going to continue to voice this desire. Our own Mayor did a similar thing in leading the campaign to bring the Hornets to New Orleans from Charlotte. Yet, when the subject matter of the Saints arises, comments from our current Mayor are made without a single phone call being placed to our team to check on our plans or to get the facts. If the Saints and Tom Benson were as important to the city as the Mayor of our city has claimed in the recent past, why such harsh comments, when a simple phone call could have saved him from embarrassment.

I take the responsibility of owning this team seriously. I understand that of all the businesses that may never return to New Orleans, the thought and discussion of the Saints not returning to New Orleans is a subject that will garner the most intense scrutiny of the public and media. A direct result of this scrutiny has been the many negative editorials and columns written or said about me. These are from some media people who have never run a company and have no clear understanding of how to run a successful business. In fact, many New Orleans businesses have either moved, permanently closed, or are dramatically downsizing, because of this tragic event. We are one company from New Orleans that has poured its heart and soul into staying afloat and on track. We wish nothing but the best and the speediest recovery for the many businesses and families affected by the hurricane.

In retrospect, I can say that I am very proud of our organization and how we have responded. We did not fold, we did not suspend, we did not downsize, we have continued to operate and represent the city and fans of New Orleans. When the time is right and the factors that are yet unresolved, are resolved, a decision on the future of the team will be made. Until then, we should all work together to find answers to the many questions that remain unanswered in making New Orleans a better city than it was prior to this catastrophe.

Sincerely,

Tom Benson
Owner- New Orleans Saints

