MATT LAUER, co-host:

A joyful noise is coming from the city of New Orleans these days, not the sound of music, but the sound of hammering and sawing. Because the first large-scale construction project since Hurricane Katrina is now under way in that city. It is called the New Orleans Habitat Musicians' Village. It's backed by that city's arm of Habitat for Humanity, and Harry Connick Jr. is one of the honorary chairmen of the project. And he joins us here on the plaza.

Hey, Harry, good to have you back.

Mr. HARRY CONNICK Jr.: Hey. Thanks.

LAUER: Before I talk, go ahead, yeah, absolutely. Before I talk specifically about this project, you've been down there a couple of times. How would you characterize the overall rebuilding effort in the months since Katrina?

Mr. CONNICK: It's been real slow, Matt. That's why I decided with Branford Marsalis to concede the idea of trying to rehouse some of the displaced musicians in New Orleans because there wasn't really anything going on and on a large scale, there isn't a lot going on. So along with Branford and Habitat for Humanity, we have been able to start construction on 30 houses and hopefully in the future, we'll have as many as 300.

LAUER: And let me talk about why musicians, because a lot of people say, 'Hey, we need schools, we need hospitals,' but your--your focus is let's make sure when we rebuild New Orleans we don't lose some of the soul of New Orleans.

Mr. CONNICK: Yeah. the culture's very important and it's very fragile. We're also going to have a school in our village called the Ellis Marsalis School for Music, which is going to help continue the tradition of you know, teaching music from one generation to the next.

LAUER: When you think about the project, though--when you think about the project, we have hurricane season coming, there's a question about the levees and a lot of people are concerned that some of the things that are being rebuild in New Orleans are being put right back in harm's way. How do you feel about that?

Mr. CONNICK: I--I can't answer it only because I don't know the--the technicalities of all of that. I know that our village is being going to be save because it's being built in the right way. And the people who are building it understand architecturally how it has to be done. But you know, it's--I don't--I don't know anything about...
LAUER: So you think it's a responsible build?

Mr. CONNICK: Oh, yeah. Oh, no, definitely. These people know what they're doing. You know, we built some houses with habitat five years ago, and they were right in that area, they got hit really hard, and those houses were fine. So it's just a matter of building them the right height off of sea level.

LAUER: In New Orleans lingo, you got a pretty good crew helping you on this.

Mr. CONNICK: Yeah, great crew.

LAUER: Tell me about some of the people who are involved?

Mr. CONNICK: Well, we're really lucky. We have a lot of people that are starting to find out about it. Most recently, we have Dave Matthews, who raised $1.5 million through a concert or concerts in Denver. And he's issuing a challenge grant to try to match that. And I mean, a million and a half dollars for something like this is--is just unbelievable. You know, it's going to help--I mean, these are people's lives.

LAUER: Right.

Mr. CONNICK: They're going to be able to come back to New Orleans and live in New Orleans and it's--it's going to be huge, so we're thinking.

LAUER: Some of the other names I've heard, you've got Bob and Suzanne Ryder, of course, with GE. And NBC. Sting and a lot of other people helping.

Mr. CONNICK: Of course. Clint Eastwood just signed on. So it's--it's really becoming something that's gaining some momentum, and it's just great because New Orleans, although it's--it's a wonderful city and it's starting to come back with Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest, it still is in dire straits and we need all the help we can get.

LAUER: You're still in "The Pajama Game" on Broadway. You going to run through June, right, sold out through June. And I understand some of the performances are actually going to raise money for this particular cause?

Mr. CONNICK: Right, from June the 13th through the 17th, we're having five benefit performances that are going to help some Broadway charities as well as the Katrina victims, so.

LAUER: How are you enjoying this--all this experience? First of all, I have to say, you know, people haven't seen you in a couple of months. I mean, first thing I said, 'cause we get to see you fairly often around here, I looked at you, I thought, you lost a lot of weight.
Mr. CONNICK: I did. I did. Well, you know, I respond to stress with food being from New Orleans, it's hard not to eat. And after Katrina, you know, I was eating everything in sight. I was just--I was devastated, you know? And then when I found out I had to take my shirt off in "The Pajama Game," I said, `Well, let me put the Twinkies aside for a while and try to lose a few pounds.'

LAUER: You lost like 30 pounds in a couple of months.

Mr. CONNICK: I did. I really had to lose--lose some weight.

LAUER: Well, good luck to you, and good luck with the project in New Orleans and continued success on Broadway.

Mr. CONNICK: Thanks, Matt.

LAUER: Harry Connick Jr. And we're going to go right now to Katie.

KATIE COURIC, co-host:

All right, Matt, thanks so much.