

## BLAKE PONTCHARTRAIN™

Questions for Blake: askblake@gambitweekly.com



### Hey Blake,

*I love the painted utility boxes in Lakeview. How can I get one painted in my neighborhood?*

**Danita Long**

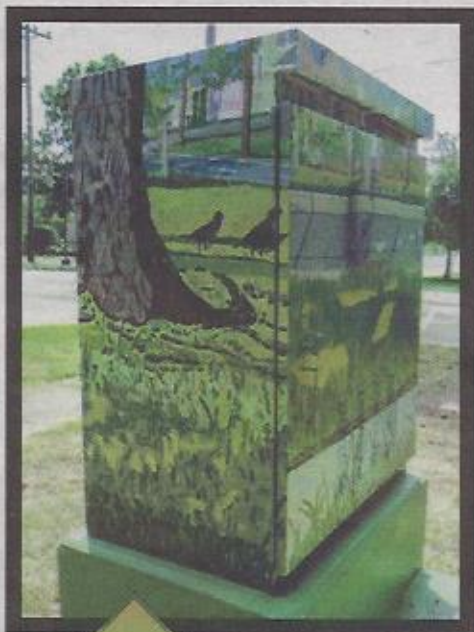
### Hey Danita,

The once-drab gray utility boxes at traffic intersections around town are steadily becoming works of art. In 2006, Jeannie Paddison Tidy set out to eliminate blight in New Orleans communities and realized that many of these boxes were prime targets for graffiti. Replicating a similar project she had initiated in San Diego, California, the utility box art project known as "New Orleans Street Gallery" was born.

This program is now the main focus of Community Visions Unlimited (CVU), which was founded in 1994 to address blighted properties in Faubourg St. John. Tidy now serves as vice president of CVU. After Hurricane Katrina, the group extended its vision to all of Orleans Parish and set out to revitalize neighborhoods.

For the New Orleans Street Gallery, CVU works with the Arts Council of New Orleans and local neighborhood associations. They invite members of the community to volunteer to clean and prime the utility boxes and encourage local artists to submit proposed designs. If an artist is selected, he or she receives paint for the project and a small cash stipend.

It's not uncommon to see one of these artworks in progress. Artists report that while they are painting, they occasionally hear passersby shout words of support and requests to bring the art to their neighborhoods. For more information about volunteering or submitting an art design, visit [www.cvunola.org](http://www.cvunola.org).



**Community Visions Unlimited and local artists are turning public utility boxes into artworks as part of the New Orleans Street Gallery project.**

PHOTO BY KANDACE POWER GRAVES

instability and violence ensued. The new government confiscated businesses and land, prompting thousands to flee.

The first refugees were ex-military or government officials and their families, who were transported to four military forts in Arkansas, California, Florida and Pennsylvania. The next wave consisted of thousands of so-called "boat people," who fled South Vietnam in boats, landing in refugee camps in nearby countries, including the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The U.S. helped relocate these refugees as well.