

Artist offers solid solution for rebirth of New Orleans

By **DAN MINER**
Contributing writer

Hurricane Katrina wiped out hundreds of thousands of homes along the Gulf Coast.

So, when Erie artist Gary Arvanitopulos heard this spring about "The House that Faux Built," he jumped at the chance to get involved.

"It was really exciting for me," Arvanitopulos said.

The charity pulled about 100 highly skilled artists from Italy, England, France, and the United States to Arlington, Va., to extensively renovate and decorate a home in Arlington.

The goal is to raise \$75,000 through tours of the house, sponsorships, and a book about the project. Those funds will go to Habitat for Humanity to build a house for people left without a home by Hurricane Katrina.

About \$46,000 has been raised so far, said Adrienne Van Dooren, project chairwoman. She hopes that sales from the book, which will be released sometime in October, will get the project closer to its goal. An early edition of the book can be bought at www.fauxhouse.com for \$39.95.

Arvanitopulos, who owns Exquisite Finishes, a painting, wallpapering, faux finishing and decorative concrete company in Erie, built a landing, shed entrance, and a concrete countertop in the kitchen.

His biggest contribution, however, was a waterfall made of synthetic stones named "Rebirth of New Orleans."

On the waterfall are three figures that appear to be climbing up the stones.

"People come out of the rocks and rubble of the actual fountain," Arvanitopulos said. "They represent the rebirth of New Orleans."

The fountain impressed Van Dooren as well.

"We thought it was great," she



DAVID GALEN

Artist Gary Arvanitopulos contributed this fountain to a house whose tours will be used to raise money for victims of Hurricane Katrina.

said. "We were just blown away with the symbology of it."

The project cost Arvanitopulos about \$800 in supplies, he said. He worked in Erie for a month and a half before driving it to Arlington to put it together in late March.

Arvanitopulos said he has trained under several different faux finish professionals, but his greatest influence comes from growing up in Greece, where he worked with his father, painting signs and murals, and his uncle, building fine furniture.

When the book comes out in October, Arvanitopulos said he will do a book signing in the area. He's been working with the Gannon Small Business Development Center to publicize his work with the project.

"If one guy like me can do something like this, imagine what 10 people can do," he said.

He lives in Erie with his wife, Barbara, and three boys.

DAN MINER recently completed an internship with the *Erie Times-News*.