



PEOPLE tick tock

STILL TICKING

story by **Matt Pitt** photos by **John Stricklin**

The amazing story behind retired Judge Daniel Guice's antique watch surviving Hurricane Katrina.

The family gathered together, during the recent air show at Keesler Air Force Base, to survey the skies. But what turned out to be the day's star attraction was an item long buried under the ground.

In April retired Judge Daniel Guice sat with family members to enjoy the Thunder on the Bay show. They watched aircraft soar from Guice's D'Iberville property, just north of the Bay. They weren't watching, however, from the comfort of a cushy sofa or screened-in porch. During Hurricane Katrina, Guice's home, along with the adjoining house owned by his daughter, were completely devastated.

Even the concrete slabs had been broken apart. All that remained were vacant lots and tender memories. The hurricane and storm surge had claimed countless keepsakes that Guice treasured over the years. He assumed he would never see any of them again. >>

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Daniel Guice

That changed after his daughter, Carolyn Singletary, strolled the grounds. Something glinting in the sun caught her eye. It turned out to be one of her father’s intricate gold cufflinks. The link was part of a custom-made set bestowed to Guice back in 1973. It was a gift to honor a distinguished career of public service. Starting in 1956, Guice served in the state legislature. Throughout the 1960s, Guice served as Biloxi’s mayor, a position he held until 1973.

Singletary continued to patrol the premises and soon uncovered a watch. It was in such a shabby state, she mistook it for costume jewelry. “The blooming thing was just covered with mud,” Guice elaborated. “It’s amazing that it wasn’t destroyed because big bulldozers had pushed around the slab.”

The timepiece is hardly costume jewelry. It is a platinum-and-diamond Longines Swiss-made watch, circa 1935. Guice first bought it in 1952. He intended it as a gift for a friend set to retire. The longer Guice held the watch, though, the more he wanted to hold onto it. So he kept it for his own use and got his friend a pocket watch.

Before evacuating Katrina, Guice hadn’t been able to collect the timepiece. “We didn’t know the hurricane was going to be nearly as bad as it was,” he added. It delighted him to see his watch again. Because



of its cracked glass face and coatings of mud and rust, he was skeptical that it would ever run again.

Still, he brought it by Gulfport’s Pav & Broome Diamond Jewelers. “I wanted to see if they could repair it,” said Guice. “It had a lot of sentimental value.” Owner John Pav, who has been repairing timepieces

since the early days of Guice’s mayoral stint, inspected the piece. “Normally the timeline to repair a watch drenched with saltwater is maybe less than a week,” Pav explained. “After that they get so corroded, you have to replace the movement and rebuild them completely.



LEFT: THE LONGINES SWISS-MADE antique watch featuring platinum and diamonds alongside Guice’s intricate gold cufflink found in the storm debris after Hurricane Katrina. TOP: CAROLYN SINGLETARY and her father, Daniel Guice show off their two favorite keepsakes.

This one was a solid mass of rust.”

Renovating the watch demanded a number of steps and a bit of luck. Over the course of 46 years in the industry, Pav gathered up numerous discontinued movements and components. “Parts on these old vintage watches are very limited. But I remembered vaguely that I had one of those movements somewhere,” he said.

His hunch, happily, proved true. Pav and his staff also worked on restoring the watch’s diamonds. Many had rusted over in their exposure to the elements. He sent the timepiece’s dial off to be stripped and repainted by another company. “That’s a different ballgame. We don’t have the facilities to refinish dials,” noted Pav. “Then when I got the dial back, I reset the numerals.”

All told, Pav figured he put eight hours of work into the restoration. The entire overhaul took four weeks, factoring in waiting time for the watch to be shipped out, and then shipped back.

The finished product astounded Guice. “I didn’t dream it would look so nice. It looked like it did when I first bought it,” he said. Operational again after a long hiatus, Guice wears his watch proudly — albeit only on special occasions. “I lost a lot of keepsakes in the storm. It’s good to have a few things I can look at, recall, and enjoy.”

Recovering his watch led to practical implications, too. From 1977 to 2000, Guice served as a Harrison County judge. Even today, he still hears occasional cases — and thanks to the flick of a wrist, he can be confident he’s starting work promptly. “I always try to be punctual for my cases,” he said, laughing. “So, it’s great to have a good timepiece.”