

August 22, 2011

Statement from Arnie D. Fielkow

Nearly twelve years ago, I received one of the best phone calls of my entire life when New Orleans Saints ownership called to offer me an opportunity to fulfill a life-long dream - a senior front office position in the NFL and to live in the great city of New Orleans. I had worked my entire professional career for such a chance and will be forever grateful to the Saints organization. During my six-year Saints tenure, we enjoyed some incredible moments both on and off the field. I will certainly never forget watching my Dad, who passed away a few months ago, swell up with pride and joy when I was announced as the Saints new Director of Administration. Also, who will ever forget that magical night at the end of December, 2000 when 70,000 Who Dat fans literally danced the night away after the club's first ever playoff win. Jim Henderson's call of "Hakim dropped the ball, Hakim dropped the ball, there is a G-d after all" will forever ring in my and Saints fans' ears.

But along the way, something interesting also occurred. While my family and I moved to New Orleans for a job, we totally fell in love with a city – its people, culture, food, music and so much more. My wife Susan and I have made life-long friends in this great community. Our children – all now certified black and gold fans for life - grew up in the Crescent City and all of us will forever treasure the time we have spent here. When my life – like so many others – was changed dramatically after Katrina and my spirits so down after departing the Saints, New Orleanians picked me up, put me on their shoulders and provided me with a most incredible professional opportunity to help build back our beloved city by electing me Councilman-at-Large. Not a small feat for a first time politician, and a Yankee at that! I owe all New Orleanians a huge debt of gratitude for embracing my family and me, and always supporting us through thick or thin.

Over the past six years in public office, I have been both honored and privileged to serve the people of New Orleans. I have worked as hard as possible to help improve the lives of all New Orleanians and am proud of our joint accomplishments. Be it helping ensure that the Saints remained in New Orleans for the long term, the reform of NORD, the recent ground breaking of the new Major League Baseball Urban Youth Academy, the creation of the new public-private partnership for economic development, creation of the Office of Inspector General, authorship of laws to strengthen local and minority contracting, strong advocacy to combat discrimination and inequity, ensuring social justice for the gay, lesbian and immigrant communities, supporting a broadening of adoption laws, passage of laws to ensure a more transparent and open government, or even our annual youth civil rights trip to Birmingham, I can honestly state that I have given everything I had, and have finished much of the agenda I set out to accomplish to make New Orleans a better city and help it realize its yet untapped potential. Of special importance, the Saints continued presence here in New Orleans means everything to our citizens and I am tremendously gratified they have remained here and will be here for years to come.

I continue to be awed each and every day by the resiliency, courage and passion of New Orleanians, and, under the leadership of Mayor Landrieu and the City Council, have no doubt that New Orleans will soar in the future. It will certainly be the adopted home forever of Arnie, Susan, Justin, Michael, Steven, Yana and Svetlana Fielkow.

But as the familiar lyrics from the Pete Seeger song states, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose...” And for me and my family, such a time has occurred as an opportunity has arisen which, for both personal and professional reasons, just cannot be passed up at this time in my life. The announcement today is being made with a mixture of both joy and sorrow. My family and I are greatly excited about this tremendous new opportunity, and most importantly the chance to have all of our children be within a stones throw of our new home. As New Orleanians certainly know, there is nothing more important than family and the chance to live in the same city as all of our children is something which simply could not be passed up. Having our two young daughters grow up in the same area with their brothers and having a chance to watch our youngest son compete at the intercollegiate athletic level the next four years were certainly very important considerations in our decision. Regrettably, though, this professional opportunity requires us to leave a city we love and will undoubtedly miss. Also, while I sincerely wish the timing for this new position had been different, regrettably I had no control over when it presented itself. I have given as much as I humanly could to the City of New Orleans over the past twelve years, and I very much hope that New Orleanians will understand and wish me well as I pursue a professional dream.

As my close friends know, I have dearly missed the sports field, an industry in which I have spent over 20 years. Today, I am announcing that I am returning to this career to accept the position as the new Chief Executive Officer of the National Basketball Retired Players Association. The NBRPA, the official association of the NBA, ABA and Harlem Globetrotters, is comprised of all former players from these organizations. This Association was founded in 1992 by basketball legends Oscar Robertson, Dave Bing, Dave DeBusschere, Dave Cowens and Archie Clark, and works in direct partnership with both the NBA and National Basketball Players Association. This new leadership opportunity presents an incredible upside for growth, including initiatives around the globe, national television and marketing, and events/programming designed to enhance the quality of life for all former players. I am extremely honored that the NBRPA Board of Directors, after an exhaustive national search, has entrusted me with the leadership of this prestigious organization,

This morning I tendered a formal letter of resignation, effective October 1, to City Council President Clarkson and look forward to working with the entire Council in concluding my city work over the next six weeks. I am confident the Council will identify an able and qualified interim replacement on October 1, pending a special election this fall.

I would like to thank the members of my staff for their incredible efforts and the dedication they have exhibited. I will certainly be working with each of them to assist in whatever way I can relative to their future professional endeavors.

Let me close by saying that, while my family and I are very excited about what lies ahead, we will always call New Orleans home and will closely follow the great success still to come for this city. We look forward to returning often – including next spring when our oldest son graduates from Tulane Law School – to watch the city’s progress, its accomplishments and without question its future Two Dats and Three Dats Super Bowl championships. In fact, my new position will undoubtedly allow me to do good things for, and in, New Orleans, and don’t be too surprised if the Fielkow’s return to our great city somewhere down the road.

Thank you New Orleans for the best twelve years a family could ever have. We will miss you dearly and forever treasure the moments we shared. May G-d bless this city and its incredible people!

Arnie D. Fielkow