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# Andrews Student Postpones Graduation for Service

BY ELIZABETH LECHLEITNER

If anyone deserves to indulge in a serious bout of senioritis, it's Brit Steele. An Andrews student since 2000, and active in ministry since his freshman year, Brit is a familiar face on campus. But it's not video games or girls that keep him from graduating; ministry opportunities are Brit's biggest distraction.

Take this past school year, for instance. Brit had planned to spend the year studying at River Plate Adventist University in Argentina. But since the school's fall semester begins a month later than Andrews, Brit was still in Berrien Springs when Hurricane Katrina lambasted New Orleans, the surrounding coastal areas of Louisiana, and southern Mississippi.



Members of the WeCare Katrina leadership team include (from left): Justin Wagner, Kirk Rice, Brit Steele, Chantal Henery, Rochelle Webster.

That's when Center for Youth Evangelism's executive director, Ron Whitehead, called Brit about leading the WeCare Katrina disaster response team. After a whirlwind of volunteer recruitment, Brit found himself in Waveland, Mississippi, approximately an hour north of New Orleans. Designed so volunteers can "plug in their efforts where their interests lay," Brit says the WeCare team tackled everything from debris removal and supply distribution to house gutting and tutoring kids whose schools were annihilated by Katrina.

Brit notes that WeCare trips, while sprint-like in their initial intensity, prove equally committed to endurance. Although months have passed since initial clean-up efforts, WeCare maintains a presence in the area. In mid-March, Steele coordinated a "Spring Break crunch trip." Now that Waveland has received its second round of hurricane relief, Brit says, "[WeCare] will keep reevaluating the situation and extend our presence as long as necessary."

Leading WeCare Katrina isn't the first altruistic academic detour Brit has taken. He admits to catching the

"travel bug" early in life. During high school, he was privileged to participate in three overseas missionary trips, and it wasn't long after enrolling at Andrews University that he sacrificed a year to his first ministry pursuit. During his sophomore year, Brit stinted as an associate taskforce pastor in Washington State. A year later, he decided to teach English in the

Philippines. Closer to home, Brit volunteered to direct the 2005 and 2006 Andrews Easter Passion plays. And while he jokes about "getting too old" to graduate, he isn't apologetic about postponing his graduation. "You just never regret traveling or taking time out to positively impact people's lives," reiterates the senior international business major.

With his new position as the Center for Youth Evangelism's WeCare domestic mission trip director, it appears Brit has finally found his ministry niche. Of course, Brit has every intention of graduating in two years. But if another ministry opportunity presents itself, and Andrews doesn't impose any age limits on first-time aisle-walkers in the meantime, it seems safe to assume the humanitarian-minded Brit won't turn it down. When he does graduate, Brit hopes to help the Adventist church strengthen its disaster relief team since most of the church's relief agencies, like ADRA, focus on development rather than first-response. And with such a college career devoted to active ministry, it also seems a given that whatever career path Brit finally settles on, it will be a worthy one.

Elizabeth Lechleitner is a senior English major at Andrews University.

