

HEEDING THE CALL



Hurricane Katrina slammed the Gulf Coast on August 29, packing winds of over 140 miles per hour and generating a massive storm surge. Although government response was initially slow, aid and supplies finally began to pour in from all corners of the country. Not far off the hurricane's direct path, Lumberton, Mississippi, home to Bass Memorial Academy, also suffered major damage during the storm. When word of that institution's distress got out, Andrews University students, faculty and staff were among the first, "Heeding The Call."



by Beverly Stout

Just days after hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, nearly 100 students, faculty, and staff from Andrews University, Andrews Academy, Broadview Academy, and Great Lakes Academy gave up their Labor Day weekend to do something to assist those in need. When Bass Memorial Academy in Lumberton, Mississippi, sent out a call for help cleaning up their devastated campus, Andrews quickly jumped into action.

Ron Whitehead, assistant to the president for spiritual life, pulled together a leadership team that included Chaplain Patrick Murphy, Pastor Glenn Russell, assistant professor of religion, and Frances Faehner, vice president of student services. The group met with interested parties on campus to plan for the trip.

The response was overwhelming. Within a matter of two days, more than twice the anticipated number of volunteer students, faculty and staff had gathered the necessary funds for the trip. On Thursday evening, September 1, two busloads of eager and earnest volunteers began their long journey south, buoyed by a police escort away from campus onto the local highway.

The convoy arrived at Bass Memorial Academy midafternoon on Friday, and pitched right into the work. It quickly became evident that this was much more than a simple cleanup. Although located 90 miles north of New Orleans, the rural communities of Lumberton and Purvis, Miss., still felt much of the brunt of Katrina's strength. With no electricity or running water, extensive property damage and limited fuel, these were a people in need.

"I had no idea that a place 90 miles from the coast would be hit so hard!" commented AU student Erica Slikkers, a senior public-relations major. "Instead of just cleaning up debris from the storm, we were feed-



Opposite: A glimpse of the devastation in the Mississippi Gulf region

Above: AU students gather on campus in preparation to leave for Mississippi

Right: A damaged wall in the Bass Memorial Academy gymnasium



ing an entire community out of a mobile kitchen!"

"I remember talking to a family who shared with me that they had recently started bathing in the creek behind their home," Erica continued. "This seemed so primitive and so unlike Americans. It really set in the idea that these people we were helping were just like us. We were in our own country's borders, yet they lived as if they were in a third-world country."

Originally asked to help repair and clean up the grounds of the academy, over the next four days the group ended up doing much more. Joining forces with Adventist Community Team Services (ACTS), a disaster response team from the Florida Conference, Andrews volunteers went into the surrounding community to distribute water and food, worked in one of two mobile soup kitchens, unloaded semitrucks of

donated food and water, repaired a roof, and performed a variety of other tasks.

BURGEONING LEADERS

From beginning to end, the success of the trip hinged on the necessary role of student leadership, from those who helped manage the registration madness in the campus ministries office to those who worked in the distribution line. Following are the stories of three of those student leaders: Andrew

Moreno, who coordinated a crew to feed thousands from a mobile kitchen; Dave Gillis, who led a team with varying skill levels to re-roof the boys' dorm; and John Hood, who helped shoot the video footage that would be used to tell the world about what happened on the trip.

IN THE KITCHEN

What kind of qualifications do you need to be the head cook of a kitchen that feeds over a thousand people a day? If you're Andrew Moreno, a youth ministry graduate student, all you need is a willing spirit, endurance, and a little creativity. Andrew got the job as head cook of the mobile kitchen on the Bass campus, one of two set up and run by ACTS, "by default." He asked what he could do to help, and Russell assigned him the duty of chef. "I was there to work; I didn't care what [the job] was," he explains. Andrew spent Saturday and Sunday working in the kitchen nonstop from 5:00 am to 10:00 pm, organizing a rotation of cooking and cleaning crews.

The question of "what's for dinner?" was always somewhat up in the air. Having to put together three meals a day without ample supplies was an adventure. "We got water and ice, but it was very sporadic what food we were getting in," said Andrew. "We had to figure out what we could make a meal out of. We had spaghetti, but very little sauce. So, we had to throw in some tomato paste, etc.... We would throw other stuff in because there was too much of one thing and too little of another and try to make a menu out of it. I had to constantly go in the refrigerated truck, try and move things around, check for what was and wasn't spoiled."

An experienced youth pastor, but not necessarily an experienced chef, Andrew has been on several mission trips and was excited to join the



Above: AU students distributed canned goods and other supplies that were donated

Left: Temporary food tent on Bass Memorial campus

Opposite top: Donated tools used for rebuilding effort

Opposite bottom: Dave Gillis (pointing) and roofing crew

Project Katrina crew and be a part of such a quick response. "I wanted to see it all come together: the money being raised and given gladly by students; the equipment coming in, then going down there and being able to help a sister school and the community, and seeing the whole structure and how it came about."

Long days spent in the mobile kitchen aren't the only impressions Andrew walked away with; he particularly recalls an unforgettable conversation shared with a stranger. On Monday morning as the Andrews team was preparing to return to Michigan, an exhausted Moreno handed over his cooking responsibilities to a fresh crew from Orlando and escaped to the gym, where the group had set up camp. A woman he

had seen every day in the food tent coming for meals with her husband and kids entered the gym and approached him. She told him that she had returned to volunteer, and then asked if she could talk to him. Her eyes filled with tears. "I need you to pray for me," she told him. Andrew told her he would. "No, I need you to pray for something specific," she insisted. "My husband is a crack addict."

"That moment has stayed with me," Andrew states. "It showed me that we don't have to wait for a disaster to strike in order to help. She was already in her disaster. She was already in her Katrina before Katrina struck, and there are thousands upon thousands like her."

ON THE ROOF

"Evangelism is my weakness, but building is my strength," notes Dave Gillis, current Andrews architecture student. "I wanted to preach via work."

A licensed contractor back in his home state of California, Dave came to Mississippi with his own supply of tools, ready to work and lead out if necessary. Dave's skill and experience in construction was just what the campus of Bass Academy needed. Katrina had done serious damage to the roof of the boys' dormitory and immediate repair was needed.

Dave inherited a construction crew of varying skill levels that took up the enormous task of reroofing the dorm, as well as the roof on the home of a Bass faculty member. The crew also found time to go into the community, taking chainsaws to trees that had fallen on houses.

Tools and materials were in ample supply, thanks to the generosity of friends of Andrews who had sent tools and equipment down with the group. Truckers from West Texas and others brought in pallet after pallet of asphalt paper, roofing nails, and shingles. "All the construction needs were met with ease," Dave comments.

But by far the largest task on their plates was the boys' dorm. At the project's peak, 30-40 volunteers from both Andrews and Southern Adventist University worked on the roof, some doing demolition, tearing off old shingling, with more skilled workers applying the new roofing material. Before the group from Southern had to leave on Sunday, the crew had completed almost half of the project in one day.

"When they left, the long hours began," Dave states. "We worked at night with lights and early in the morning when the hot sun wasn't bearing down."

"I've hired many people in my day for projects, but without a shadow of a doubt, the student crew had more



drive than I've ever seen," he comments. "I remember it was getting late, and we were hot, tired, and behind schedule, so I went below the belt. I told everybody that it wasn't my job or their job, but God's work, and even after their reserves were spent, they worked harder and longer and roofed even more. I can't push nonbelievers that hard. It breaks my heart to remember their sacrifice of toil and their willingness to go when you can't go anymore."

BEHIND THE CAMERA

After spending a long week working on projects and taking photos for the Cast, Andrews' pictorial campus directory, John Hood, a photographic imaging major, was looking forward to a relaxing Labor Day holiday. John was setting up for the last night of Cast photos on Wednesday, when AUSA president Guillermo Magana stopped and asked if he was going on the Katrina trip, mentioning that it would be good to



Top: The destruction stretched far into Waveland, Mississippi

Bottom: More damage on the Bass Memorial campus



have someone to take video footage.

"I hadn't thought of it, because I was busy and didn't have the money," John explains. "Then AUSA said they'd sponsor me. I'd been watching the news quite a bit, and I don't pass up the opportunity to help."

John became part of a three-man camera crew, whose footage of the Katrina trip would reach audiences across the country and around the world. John, Andrews Academy senior Tim Wolfer, and communication major Adam Kotanko were rarely seen without a video camera strapped to their

shoulders, a digital camera, or a microphone in their hands.

Each of the three used their individual talents and focused on different aspects of filming. John took 2.5 hours of video and over 300 photographs, many of which have accompanied articles printed across the country. Tim shot six hours of video, interviewing whoever would talk to him. Adam set up interviews with staff and other volunteers, shooting a total of 12 hours of video.

When they weren't taping, John was eager to pitch into the work. "I had a

hard time just shooting. I wanted to help, too," he said. The project leaders "were like, 'yeah, you're a great helper, but make sure you shoot tons of video, too.' I felt torn."

If the guys thought they were busy on the trip, the real work started when they got back to campus Tuesday morning. While others may have taken time to recover, John was busy burning a DVD of raw footage that would appear that night on two local news stations. Tim and Adam worked hard to edit a seven-minute video to be shown in chapel that Thursday, staying up all night on Wednesday and finishing it just 3-4 minutes before it was to be aired. Since then, coverage has appeared on the Hope Channel and a promotional video for WeCare, with the potential for more projects in the future.

But John walked away with more than just hours of video and something to add to his portfolio. "I guess spiritually, my faith is pretty moved. It was really cool being the hands and feet of Jesus. That was the biggest thing, really living out the Christian experience of working together, praying together, serving together."

"We're hampered by our modern American society in that we can do everything for ourselves. We're never really hungry, or don't have anything we can't go out and get in ten minutes. When we don't have that luxury, then we can really see how God can work. That whole four days seemed fast, but it was like a two-week mission trip. Time seemed to be slowed down for us to do more, because we did so much, helping hundreds and hundreds."

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