

Report on January 2007 Livingston CARES Work Trip to Biloxi, Mississippi

Prepared by: Tom Matthews, Trip Leader

Twenty Livingston CARES volunteers left for Biloxi, Mississippi on Saturday, January 6. The volunteers traveled from several different locations by plane to New Orleans. The largest group of 12 flew from Buffalo on Northwest Airlines and arrived as the sun was setting over Lake Ponchartrain. We left immediately in three Avis rental cars and settled for a quick stop at McDonalds before heading east on Interstate 10. Since it was dark we were unable to see much beyond the trees and signs for interchanges. We arrived at Camp Biloxi on Pass Road too late for orientation. We did meet Camp Directors Julie and Howard who run the camp for the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepard. It had been a long day that began for many around 5:00 am so most of us went to bed by 11:00 pm.

Breakfast in the camp is served daily between 6:30 – 7:30 am but we quickly learned that we needed to be there at 6:30 to make sure we had a full breakfast. There were several other groups in camp mostly from Lutheran churches in Wisconsin, Iowa, Michigan, California, South Carolina, and Florida. There were several college students and even a few high school students in other groups. We were fortunate to have a small group so we were able to stay in the Orphan Grain Train railroad car bunk houses that accommodated four, six or eight people. The showers were in a converted railroad car and the toilets and washroom in a second car.

On Sunday after breakfast we were invited by our friend Connie Rockco (Ms. Connie), Harrison County Supervisor for District 5 to attend an early morning church service at her Cedar Lake United Methodist Church in Biloxi. The congregation restored the building that was damaged by several feet of water from Katrina. We were warmly greeted by Ms. Connie and other members of the church both during and after the service. For the next four hours we caravanned in four cars on a tour of Biloxi to see the aftermath of Katrina. The first area we drove through was the Eagle Point section of Biloxi where several people died and dozens of beautiful upscale homes were virtually wiped out. Some of us had been there last year and were amazed to see the rebuilding of the area. We also toured East Biloxi and stopped at the end of the peninsula to see the Route 90 Bridge to Ocean Springs that is under reconstruction. Ms. Connie shared her insights and thoughts on the history of the area and possibilities for the future of the Gulf Coast. We started to drive west on Route 90 along the beaches but needed a restroom break so we took advantage of free parking in the mammoth new Beau Ravage Hotel and Casino for a quick tour of the hotel. When we were in Biloxi last year restoration was going on 24/7; the facility reopened on the anniversary of Katrina on August 29.

We had planned a picnic in the afternoon but it rained on and off all day so we ended up going to a Sonic for lunch. Ms. Connie arranged an interview for us with the Biloxi ABC affiliate at the Katrina Memorial in Biloxi that had been completed last year in one week by Extreme Makeover. We were about to do the interview when it started pouring so the reporter followed us back to Camp Biloxi for the interview. Channel 13 ran the interview on their 11:00 news. We did not see the program but had a chance to see the transcript on their website. After dinner we joined several other groups at the camp for an orientation program that ended with a very dramatic five-minute PowerPoint presentation on Katrina.

Before dinner we went to meet the Construction Managers for the Camp Biloxi Recovery Center and figure out what our work assignments would be for the week. We had 20 volunteers willing to work but we had to make sure we could do the work without skilled tradesman on site. We were assigned to work in three houses and we divided the volunteers into two groups of ten to

start work on two houses on Monday with the expectation that one group would finish a short job list the first day and then move to a third house to continue sanding work on a historic home owned by the City of Biloxi. The Biloxi team of 10 went to a house on Magnolia Street to do finishing work painting doors and trim. The Gulfport team of 10 went to a house on Mississippi Street in Gulfport to apply popcorn textured paint on ceilings and numerous end of reconstruction finishing projects.

The Gulfport Team worked all week on their house and accomplished an amazing amount of work. The first couple of days the team returned along with a fair amount of dust from scraping and removing textured popcorn paint from five rooms. The team learned new skills applying textured paint on the five ceilings. A toilet was repaired and the house was cleaned and organized in preparation for the owner to return to her home. Outside work included installing trim on windows, applying two coats of paint on the entire exterior, replacing porch railings, fixing trim, and removing debris from the yard.

On Tuesday, the Biloxi team split with five members returning to the Magnolia Street house and five starting work on scraping and sanding the outside of a two-story house on Howard Avenue. The finishing work on the Magnolia Street house extended throughout the week with spackling, sanding, and painting the trim with multiple coats on eight rooms and two bathrooms. A toilet was replaced and a second one repaired, trim was replaced in two bathroom windows and in the laundry room, water stains on ceiling tiles were painted with Kilz, and windows were cleaned. The scraping and sanding on the Howard Avenue house continued through Friday.

The Livingston CARES team worked five eight hour days with an estimated contribution of approximately 800 volunteer hours to the reconstruction efforts in Harrison County, Mississippi. Tom Hurlburt, a Navy Seabee stationed in Gulfport and son of Connie Hurlburt, also assisted our teams during the week.

Team members from previous work trips visited five families and had an opportunity to see the end results of the reconstruction efforts and to continue our connections with the people of Harrison County. Lyle Lehman and several students attended a meeting of the ARC Board of Directors in Gulfport; the Livingston-Wyoming ARC will be providing some support for their program and directly to the people served by the Gulfport ARC. Members of the CARES steering committee (Tom Matthews, Lyle Lehman, and Kathleen Jones) also spent part of the day investigating future projects. We toured the Moore Community House, the only day care center serving the poor in East Biloxi, and discussed possible projects with director Carole Burnett. We met Cindy Simmons, Harrison County Beautification Director, and Larry Benefiel, Harrison County Supervisor for District 2 at the Harrison County Lyman Work Center in Gulfport and toured a former green house area that Livingston CARES may help restore. We also drove to the Woolmarket area in District 5 to visit the Woolmarket baseball and football recreation fields and discussed possible CARES funding for replacement of destroyed bleachers and/or a flag pole with Todd Herrin and Randy Wood who manage the complex.

On Friday night we celebrated the completion of our work with a night out for dinner at The Shed, a famous barbeque restaurant in Ocean Springs. Six team members also traveled over the border to Alabama for souvenirs and the other team members returned to camp to pack.

On Saturday we left Biloxi at 8 am and drove west on Route 90 along the coast through Gulfport to Pas Christian in order to get a better perspective on the impact of Katrina. Some of the communities like Pas Christian that lie at lower elevations were ninety percent destroyed by Katrina. On our drive we observed several areas with dozens of occupied FEMA trailers. We

continued on Interstate 10 to New Orleans and drove downtown to spend a couple of hours at Jackson Square and the French Quarter. We regrouped at noon and drove briefly over the levee into the Ninth Ward. Our planned route back was blocked off for a Martin Luther King Day parade and the detour took us past several more blocks of flooded houses; the images were even more dramatic than the ones we have frequently seen on television. Then it was back to Interstate 10 to return the cars and check in for our return flights. Fortunately the weather cooperated and there were no travel delays getting home late Saturday night on January 13.

The trip was very successful and everyone came away feeling good about the experience. We have encouraged participants to share their reflections on the blog on the Livingston CARES website at <http://livingstoncares.geneseo.edu> Several have already been posted.

January 2007 Livingston CARES Work Trip Participants

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| Lindsay Black | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Nancy Burkhardt | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Jill DeTosta | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Carolyn Dominiak | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Christina Erbacher | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Emily Froome | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Rosa Holland | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Connie Hurlburt | Retired SUNY Geneseo Employee |
| Kathleen Jones | Retired SUNY Geneseo Faculty Member |
| Colin Kremer | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Lyle Lehman | Retired SUNY Geneseo Faculty Member |
| Tony Macula | SUNY Geneseo Faculty Member |
| Betsy Matthews | Retired Village of Geneseo Employee |
| Tom Matthews | SUNY Geneseo Administrator |
| Marie Olander | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Trevor Ramsey | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Michael Sauter | Newman Catholic Chaplain at SUNY Geneseo |
| Ellen Schmidt | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Breana Sullivan | SUNY Geneseo Student |
| Megan Webb | SUNY Geneseo Student |