

Work, need continue in New Orleans

By Pam Stouffer

On a recent May Sunday, 12 volunteers from Covenant Presbyterian Church in Marshall MO arrived at Olive Tree Volunteer Village to give of their time, talent, and energy in the ongoing recovery effort of rebuilding New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Five of our group were experiencing a mission trip with Covenant for the first time and the other seven were veteran participants.

This huge endeavor to rebuild is a joint effort of the Presbytery of South Louisiana, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and Project Homecoming. In 2007, churches in the Presbytery of South Louisiana hosted 4,446 volunteers, contributing 156,640 hours of work, totaling \$2,662,880 worth of labor. This included gutting 212 homes, completing reconstruction of 59 homes, and working on another 40 more in various states of completion.

One wonders how the homeowners feel toward this myriad of people who come here to help put their homes and lives back together, and I quote from our homeowner's daughter, Jarleen Crawford:

"After all we've gone through, I really think the renovation is done better with volunteers," she said. "The work is just better." Seven members of her family lost their homes and have had to go through renovation.

On Sunday evening our very capable and knowledgeable Village leader, Kerry Herdegen, 25, gave us a very in-depth report of all the work that has been going on in New Orleans over the past three years. He prepared us emotionally and spiritually to be ready for our week's work.

The next morning we met Jessica Jennette, the work site manager, who assigns the work projects to each of the groups living at Olive Tree for the week. Our group was divided into



Mission volunteers who spent a week in New Orleans rehabbing homes include (front row, l-r) Jim Long, Jeani Wilson, Pam Stouffer, Jackie Guthrey, Elaine Jones, Chuck Hird, (back for l-r) Bruce Berry, Gina Sandwith, Marty Hird, Charles Guthrey, Vicki Mitchell and Joe Mitchell.

two groups of six and then we spent the rest of the week working hard meeting, relating and learning about the life stories of our families and of the homes we were working on. We also experienced a little of the flavor of New Orleans, laughed and had fun with each other.

Having organized mission trips since 1999, I can tell you that

you form very special bonds with those people who participate in them. I strongly encourage anyone who has the opportunity to experience a mission trip to do so. You'll be glad you did.

Pam Stouffer is an elder in Covenant Presbyterian Church and is serving as a commissioner to the Synod of Mid-America on the Mission & Advocacy Committee.

Excerpts from a mission diary

The Group—5 cars, 12 people, hours of arrangements, lots of bathroom stops, fried okra on the road—joining together with another 50 from Canada, Oklahoma, New York and North Carolina.

The Destination—4532 Read Street, New Orleans—formerly a Presbyterian church, formerly a day care center, and formerly filled with 12 inches of water in the deluge of Hurricane Katrina Aug. 29, 2005.

Working in the Lakeview area—a pleasant 81 degrees, high

humidity, high tree pollen count

Madrid Street work site—home to an 81-year-old man whose house was under 8 feet of water. The house needs touch up, painting and caulking, installing a front door, cleaning floors. The electricity is not yet into the house; we have electricity on the pole and use an extension cord for the Shop Vac, paint without lights in some areas.

Cartier work site—a full day of tile and laminate floor installation,

Continued on following page

July 2008

Excerpts from a mission diary

Continued from Page 1

done with a gasoline-powered generator. The home was taken down to the slab and totally rebuilt, now a 3-bedroom, 2-bath, on a very tight budget. Much bigger than the 150 square feet in the FEMA trailer where Avis and her two daughters lived until recently.

It is hard to comprehend that 9 to 12 feet of water covered these homes for two weeks, then over 2 months slowly drained out. Imagine being out of your home—and every possession gone—for close to three years.

Our Number 1 goal, given

to us by the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance on-site director, is to GIVE HOPE. This means that when a homeowner comes on site, the most important action a volunteer can give is no action, but lots of listening. PDA has a commitment through 2013. We're told post-traumatic stress syndrome hasn't hit New Orleans yet, that those affected are still going through trauma.

Compiled from e-mails sent back home by Jean Gaddy-Wilson.

Coming next month: Mission Village leader profiles.

Heartland Presbyterian Center

A good place for listening

Heartland Presbyterian Center is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. "Shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship for the children of God" is the theme the anniversary committee chose from the Great Ends of the Church to celebrate the first half century of mission and ministry.

The camp and conference center near Parkville MO was begun when W. Felton Christopher, executive presbyter of Kansas City Presbytery cashed in his life insurance policy and secured a loan to purchase 180 acres in

then rural Platte County.

In its 49 years of operation more than 40,000 youth have camped there, and more than 100,000 people of all ages have participated in retreats and conferences. Last year more than 1,100 participated in summer programs and 8,000 attended retreats and conferences.

Heartland Center has grown physically from basic camping and conference housing to modern conference facilities, but the passion for the camp and retreat ministry remains as strong today as when the camp opened. "Heartland Center is one of those special places where our connection with God seems the strongest," said Dan Scheneman, executive director. "One camper said, 'I used to think that camp was the place where god spoke the loudest, but now I realize that camp is the place where I listen the best.' I invite you to come back to camp as a participant, as a volunteer, or on a spiritual retreat to do some of your 'best listening.'"

News about our people

Dr. Marlow Ediger, a member of First Presbyterian Church of Newton KS and professor emeritus of Truman State University, Kirksville MO, has received more publishing honors. He coauthored School Science Education published by Discovery Publishing House and has received notice that his writings on education have been published in The College Student Journal and Reading improvement.

Dr. Ediger serves as a member of the external examination committee for Alagappa University in India, evaluating PhD theses by air mail.

News from presbyteries

The confirmation students of St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, Ballwin MO, are collecting empty printer ink cartridges to help defray postage costs for mailing care packages to overseas troops. Operation Shoebox is sending the package and supplies, and their annual mailing costs are near \$200,000. Congregation members are being asked to place empty cartridges in zipper-top plastic bags and leave them on the youths' table. Operation Shoebox sells the cartridges to recyclers.

Year-round VBS

While many churches are in the midst of vacation Bible schools now, Trinity Presbyterian Church in Columbia MO has been immersed in VBS on the first and third Wednesday evenings of each month since January. Adults and children share dinner, stories, singing, crafts and fellowship.

Care bears

First Presbyterian Church of El Dorado KS collected bears, the softer the better, for newly-diagnosed cancer patients in the local Susan B. Allen Cancer Center. Victory in the Valley, a cancer support organization, requested the bears to help those with cancer diagnoses feel more at ease.

PW support

The Presbyterian Women of First Presbyterian Church of Oak Hill KS are supporting the mission of Common Ground, a nondenominational organization that provides programming for youth and children, plus physical help for those who cannot do needed labor. They learned about the operation of Common Ground at their annual community church brunch.

How to reach us

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