

A Helping Hand From Coast to Coast to Coast



Scouts and Scouters across America have contributed in many ways to assist in relief and recovery efforts in the wake of last year's devastating hurricanes.



Ken Lee of Hattiesburg, Miss., cuts a fallen tree into sections to be hauled away from Camp Tiak's medical lodge.



(Left) Mikeal Jolly, a camp ranger from the National Capital Area Council's Goshen Scout Reservation in Virginia, stacks logs with a skid-steer loader at Camp Tiak. (Above) Working as a team, volunteers trim and move fallen trees from the Mississippi camp.

On Sept. 15, 2005, President George W. Bush addressed the nation from storm-ravaged New Orleans. He called on organizations—specifically churches, union locals, and Scout troops—to help the Gulf Coast recover from Hurricane Katrina.

BY MARK RAY

However, hundreds of Boy Scout troops, Cub Scout packs, Venturing crews, and Sea Scout ships hadn't waited for a presidential appeal. They were responding to Katrina, which devastated the southeastern coast on Aug. 29. And even more pitched in when Hurricane Rita struck Texas and Louisiana nine days after the president's speech.

In the four months since, Scouts and Scouters nationwide have collected relief supplies, assembled health kits, made flood buckets, cooked meals, staffed emergency shelters, taken in evacuee families, adopted Gulf Coast packs and troops, worked to restore heavily damaged Scout camps, and assisted local council employees who lost



In Biloxi, Miss., Second Class Scout Jim Corey of Troop 40, Meridian, Miss., helps a worker load ice into coolers at a Baptist church disaster relief kitchen. (Below, left) Troop 40 Life Scout Duncan Chalk unloads bags of ice from a donation truck.



Troop 40 Scout Brett Stewart sets up cots at a Red Cross disaster center in the Trinity Presbyterian Church.



Jim Hardter of Poolesville, Md., stands by as Ken Lee of Hattiesburg, Miss., cuts down a damaged tree at Camp Tiak.



First Class Scouts Austin Velotas and Brock Reynolds of Troop 40, Meridian, Miss., unload donations from a trailer at a disaster relief center in Biloxi, Miss.

their homes. In short, these volunteers have embodied the spirit of Scouting.

Paper plates and peanut butter

Just days after Hurricane Katrina left the Gulf Coast, Scout volunteers began collecting food, bottled water, and other supplies for the storm's victims. Among

those responding were members of Pack 400 and Troop 400, chartered to Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church, in Richmond Hill, Ga.

On Labor Day and the following Saturday, the Scouts collected more than 9,000 pounds of relief supplies in front of a local grocery store. Donations included everything from paper plates and peanut butter to toothpaste and baby food—"anything you have to have to feel human and survive," according to Pack 400 Cubmaster Rick Bensman. Scouts distributed supply lists as shop-

pers entered the store, collected donations as they left, and then wheeled the supplies to a waiting trailer, which had been lent by a local trucking company.

According to Bensman, the effort went so well that the store ran out of many items. "We emptied their diaper aisle the first day, and I guess we emptied it the second day, too," he said.

Working long days

Members of Troop 40, chartered to Poplar Springs Drive Baptist Church, in Meridian, Miss., had helped the American Red Cross after (continued on page 41)

Hurricanes Dennis last July and Ivan in 2004, but nothing could prepare them for the devastation they saw in Biloxi, Miss., the weekend after Katrina passed through.

"It was horrible," said Rob Corey, a 14-year-old Star Scout. Houses were completely gone; tanker trucks sat on top of cars; trees were down everywhere.

Troop 40 Scouts spent three straight weekends in Biloxi, where they unloaded trucks and distributed food and water to local residents. Working alongside them were volunteers from across the country, as well as sailors from the Royal Dutch Navy and marines from neighboring Mexico.

Scoutmaster Keith Clifford praised his Scouts for their hard work. "The cars lined up and would come all day long," he said. "We were unloading trucks at 7 o'clock and worked on through the evening."

Despite all the hard work, no one complained because the Scouts knew their efforts were needed.

A shelter from the storm

Helping out in disasters is nothing new for Venturing Crew 911, chartered to The Northern Branch Office Scout Training Team of Conroe, Tex., just north of Houston. The crew has twice helped set up a shelter at McCullough Junior High School when localized flooding forced residents from their homes. They prepared to do the same when Hurricane Rita threatened the Houston area.

This time, however, they faced a different kind of flood: Evacuees from Houston and the Texas coast flowed into the school shelters because massive traffic jams had prevented them from easily reaching shelters farther inland—where the American Red Cross had positioned its supplies and volunteers.

Fortunately, Crew 911 is a resourceful bunch. Several members are trained as first responders with emergency medical training. That allowed the crew to open the shelter without medical support and to handle intake screening of everyone who arrived, including a premature infant and a busload of Alzheimer's disease patients.

Many of the Venturers also retain membership in Boy Scout troops, and they called in fellow Scouts to help. The crew cobbled together a meal from the school's lunchroom supplies and even found a way to stock a second shelter with supplies. When supplies ran low, Venturer Whitney Davis mobilized members of her church—in the middle of the night—to deliver more food and health kits from a church-run assistance program.

Within hours of the shelter's opening, the Boy Scouts and Venturers had served a hot meal to more than 200 evacuees, but that was just the beginning.

"When we closed Sunday morning at 10, we had served more than 2,000 meals and helped nearly 600 senior citizens, men and women, boys and girls, kids and babies, plus numerous dogs and cats, two ferrets, an exotic bird, and one turtle get through an ordeal that will not soon be forgotten," enumerated Advisor Jay Walker.

Bob Cargo, a Crew 911 leader who is also director of the local Red Cross

chapter, was not surprised by how well the young people performed.

When they went into action, "I knew what was going to happen and that the objective was going to be met," he said. "McCullough was probably the best-run and smoothest-run shelter."

Oak Mountain Scouts

Oak Mountain State Park in Alabama features 52 miles of trails, a golf course, three lakes—and an evacuee camp where some hurricane victims may still be living come summer. Thanks to Scouter George Oldroyd, many of those temporary residents are participating in Scouting.

Oldroyd, a political consultant, first got involved at Oak Mountain when his sister-in-law, who was volunteering there, drafted him to help untangle some bureaucratic red tape. He quickly saw the need for organized youth activities, including Scouting.

"It seemed like the smartest way to give them some ethical structure, common ideas, a sense of community, and living skills," he said.

Working with the Birmingham-based Greater Alabama Council, Oldroyd got Cub Scout-age boys connected with area packs and organized a Boy Scout troop and Sea Scout ship to serve older youth living at the park. About 30 youth have been participating, although the population continues to fluctuate.

Oldroyd said he is especially proud of the older teens, who are forming a youth government in the camp, which may soon become a Law and Government Explorer post. The group is planning a fund-raiser to build a survivors' memorial that will stand at Oak Mountain long after they've moved on to permanent homes.

Restoring a camp

When Camp Tiak opens for business this summer, the Pine Burr Area Council's camp near Wiggins, Miss., will look vastly different, because Hurricane Katrina toppled hundreds of trees on the property and destroyed or seriously damaged many camp buildings.


But the fact that the camp will open is a testament to the dedication of Scouters across the country. In late October and early November, more than 80 volun-

teers from the National Capital Area Council in Bethesda, Md.—along with members of the Philmont Staff Association—arrived to help clear downed trees from the property. They were to be replaced in the following months by crews from the Bay-Lakes Council in Appleton, Wis., and the Gulf Stream Council in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

"The Scouting community has responded magnificently," said Rob Hofmann, Scout executive of the Pine Burr Area Council. The council even received an offer of help from Warsaw, Poland.

Council project chair William C. Evans, who coordinated the efforts of the National Capital Area volunteers, said interest was strong from the outset. "Several people literally spent days working on personal schedules, potential travel arrangements, etc., attempting to match up with us," he said. Most of them, whether college students, businesspeople, homemakers, or retirees, succeeded and made the trip to Mississippi.

Although Evans was overwhelmed by the response from so many Scouters with no direct ties to the Gulf Coast, he wasn't really surprised. "The ideals of Scouting—doing a Good Turn daily, helping other people at all times, etc.—are not just for our youth," he said. "There are a lot of adults working in the program who believe in and practice the same ideals themselves."

These efforts just begin to tell the story of how Scouting is making a difference after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. To learn more—and to find out how your unit can help—visit www.goodturnforamerica.org. 

Mark Ray is a frequent contributor to The Eagletter, published by the National Eagle Scout Association.

Editor's note: In addition to accounts of hurricane recovery efforts by Scout units and suggested activities and projects for helping, the Web site www.goodturnforamerica.org/disasterrecovery/index.html provides a way for sharing stories about unit recovery efforts and a separate section for units to register specific ways they can help and for units affected by the disaster to ask for specific types of assistance.

