

Seen on the Scene Hurricane Katrina Relief

Sept. 6, 2005

On the road

No matter where you turn, we each have an opportunity to serve. Houston is seeing only a portion of the effect of Katrina. In Tyler my 12-year-old son and I volunteered alongside local firefighters at the Tyler Food Bank and at the local YMCA Center, where over 250 evacuees had been brought. Our work was both overwhelming and humbling. While at work today, it brought to life more of the reason why our Mission Statement includes "community service" as part of why we are here.

—Karen Motsinger, Human Resources

At the George R. Brown Convention Center

I've been hanging out with Sean (McKinney, 15-year-old son of Michael McKinney, M.D.) and I spent the night at his house last night (Sept. 4). We've been swimming and we played basketball. We played Xbox, too. Everybody in Houston has been real nice. I haven't met anyone who hasn't been nice. My mom had said she wanted to move to Houston. I hope we do.

—Michael Warren, survivor

My wife and I live in Minneapolis. I own a closed-captioning company. Sept. 2 we got on a plane and came to Houston to help. We went to the Dome first and were turned away. Someone told us to go to the George R. Brown Convention Center, so after we figured out where that was, we came here. I saw the sign for the Medical Clinic and wandered in. I saw everything being set up and told the people that I know a lot about computers. They needed all kinds of supplies, so I went to Office Max and spent about \$2,000, which is a donation from my company. Then I helped set up the infrastructure of the clinic command center, helping with the computer scheduling, for example. This past March we took our spring vacation to the Gulf Coast. We drove through New Orleans and we visited Biloxi and Gulfport. We could not believe what had just happened to those areas, and we wanted to come to Houston to help.

—Volunteer Max Duckler

When I checked my e-mail Sept. 2 and saw that Public Affairs put out an "all hands on deck" call for volunteers at the George R. Brown for that night, I knew I had to go. I suspected that with late notice on a Friday, there would be few volunteers. I was pleasantly disappointed ... Since I used to work at the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority of Harris County, my previous contacts came in handy late Saturday night (Sept. 4) when a busload of disabled kids rolled in. I was able to put the medical director at MHMRA in touch with the logistics staff at the GRB to handle their needs. I was so anxious over the impact of Katrina, but somehow being able to help took all of that anxiety away for me. In a sense, I was helping the helpers!

—Patrick Courtney, School of Public Health

...My role as a volunteer at GRB is one I will never forget. I volunteered Sept. 3 registering those arriving with special needs, the next day helping to register health care volunteers and working in the special needs area, and the day after scheduling the many volunteers who have responded to the crisis. As the first of the GRB guests were arriving, I noticed that the children looked weary and afraid. I could not help but sit down by two little boys as they huddled together under a blanket on an air mattress. I read a book to them and they fell asleep. Their mother was happy to have some relief. What a gift it is that the UT family is banding together, along with other Texas Medical Center personnel to provide care, so desperately needed, to the

young and old. The physicians, dentists, nurses, mental health professionals and lay volunteers who have helped with this effort will forever be remembered by those affected by Katrina.

—Kathleen Kuznicki, Office of Public Affairs



Messages line the walls at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Photo by Dalton DeHart



When the Rev. Dr. Douglas Richnow, associate rector, St. John the Divine Episcopal Church and parishioner Howard Castleberry heard that the children's play area at the George R. Brown Convention Center could use a television, they left the GRB and returned three hours later with a big-screen TV, a DVD player and lots of DVDs for the children — a gift from that church. Photo by Nancy Hudgins

Student Epidemic Intelligence Society Activated

Beginning Saturday, Sept. 3, Kristi Lillibridge, D.V.M., professor of epidemiology at the UT School of Public Health, coordinated volunteer students, faculty members and staff from the School of Public Health and the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences in doing "Rapid Needs Assessment" for about 7,000 evacuees in the Astrodome.

A crew of about 50 people began doing face-to-face interviews, data entry, needs assessment and distribution of supplies after this Student Epidemic Intelligence Society (SEIS) project was activated the evening of Aug. 31 at the request of the Harris County Health Department.

SEIS operations and assessments began

I've never seen anything quite like this. Many of these survivors didn't have much, now they have nothing. To see their loss ... I saw an elderly man lying down hugging a teddy bear. We were able to mount a response here so quickly. We had nurses drive in from Wichita Falls, and they brought two vans

of supplies. It's all been worthwhile, it all means something. All the time we medical professionals see things that are tragic ... but sometimes you see someone that touches your soul, and all of these people have touched our souls. Holding their hands is every bit as important as the medical care we are giving.

—Margaret McNeese, M.D., Medical School

At the Astrodome

I went for my first day volunteering Sept. 6, and it was an indescribable experience. Between serving food, there is opportunity to mingle on the floor with the evacuees and just listen and discuss with them their experiences. Most of them are strangers to each other in the Astrodome, so it's not like they are all one big family discussing their experience together. Having someone to talk to and listen to them is as important right now as food. I look forward to my next visit there ... I could go on and on, but just wanted to say thanks to the organizers. I am involved in other efforts through my church as well, but this effort, face-to-face, is where my heart is. I will go as often as I can. Thanks again.

—Dee Warren, Payroll Office

This is our first time in Texas. We're going to stay. We're not going back. There's nothing there.

—Rochelle Smith of New Orleans said as she cradled her six-week-old daughter, Donee, while her 6-week-old son, Tyree, munched on animal crackers and played in an area of the pediatrics clinic while his older brother, Timothy, got immunizations so he could enroll in a Houston school.

Since I'm here, I want to do whatever I can. I can lift, I can push, and I can hand out goodies to the kids.

—Hal Linden, actor and star of the 1975-82 TV hit "Barney Miller."

I want to tell you how all our hearts are reaching out to you, Cosby said. He made his remarks from the first floor near the evacuees registration area. I'm telling all of you right here, there is something you can do. Remember courage, courage, courage. You are starting a new life. You must keep your courage. Ladies and gentlemen, you are too beautiful to let your lives go. Take advantage of this new life.

—Bill Cosby, actor/comic

People and Pets Food Drive

There was a tremendous response ... We delivered two "step" vans (large trucks) of goods to The Houston Food Bank and the Houston SPCA. Because of the way donations were pouring in at the Houston Food Bank, they didn't weigh the food, but I'm positive that it exceeded the 3,000 pounds we delivered to the annual TMC food drive in July. The folks at the Houston Food Bank were most appreciative, too. I don't believe any of the other TMC institutions have conducted back-to-back food drives like we did.

Easily several thousand pounds for the Houston SPCA as well — they don't weigh their donations. The idea to collect pet food came from Sheila Amiot in our office, and we decided to do a combined drive. When I told the woman at the Houston SPCA that we decided to do a People and Pets Food Drive, she fought back tears. This different concept was eagerly embraced by so many.

I'm overwhelmed at the generosity of spirit shown by our UT Health Science Center community and the commitment and devotion of all of the volunteers, but especially the food drive coordinators on our campus. These are the faithful few. It's also good to see so many new faces joining the volunteer ranks.

—Elease Jenkins, Public Affairs



Kristi Lillibridge, D.V.M., right, of the School of Public Health gives rapid needs assessment instructions to SPH and Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences volunteers at the Astrodome. Photo by Joseph P. Smith, SPH