VOLUNTEER VIGNETTES

ORLANDO, Fla.—Note to editor: Following are brief profiles of people and organizations that participated in volunteer efforts following Hurricane Charley. They all have interesting stories to tell about how they or their organizations were changed by the experience.

“The help that volunteers gave the people of Florida during the devastation of 2004 was an unprecedented outpouring of good will like this country has never seen,” said Volunteer Florida’s Director of Emergency Management Alex Amparo. “Its impact was beyond measure. For each volunteer there is a story of selfless giving. I would love to see those stories in the media because we will need their help again in the future.”

Because of the emergency nature of the situation, much of the labor conducted by volunteers during the 2004 hurricanes was never recorded. Therefore the total aid they provided may be vastly underestimated. Below is a partial accounting to demonstrate their contribution to the response and recovery effort.

Volunteers:

- Worked more than 6.1 million hours.
- Provided more than 19 million meals after and during hurricanes.
- Cleared large trees, limbs and debris from yards.
- Advocated on behalf of victims, helping them navigate the process of rebuilding their lives.
- Staffed shelters that assisted more than 368,000 Floridians.
- Sorted and delivered countless tons of supplies.
- Provided the labor to install 21,000 “blue roofs.”
- Raised $21 million for the Florida Hurricane Relief Fund established by Governor Bush to meet the needs of survivors and rebuild communities.
- Offered the compassion that comes from neighbor helping neighbor during extreme times of need.

Before Aug. 13, 2004, Jill Davidson was not a volunteer. Hurricane Charley turned her into one. “We couldn’t go to our regular jobs. You couldn’t just stand there and NOT help.” Jill found herself coordinating the effort by local churches to fix area roofs. Eventually she found herself in a new career.

The volunteer response during the 2004 storms was so large that the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency and Volunteer Florida, along with their partners in

-- more --
local government and the volunteer agencies, saw the need to coordinate the effort nearer the local level. Long-Term Recovery Committees (LTRCs) were the answer. Under this concept, the 40 committees across the state act as coalition builders coordinating the efforts of area volunteer groups. When a position opened up on the Pine Island committee, Jill Davidson was a natural choice.

Officially listed as Pine Island Long Term Recovery Organization in Lee County, the committee gained the nickname Beacon of Hope for what it gave the hurricane victims on the island. Jill Davidson is resolute when she compares the past with the present. “It had been over 40 years since we faced this kind of situation. Nothing had been done for generations. When Charley hit we had to start from ground zero. We had to learn who could help who. It took a long time to figure that out. We’re educated now. With the LTRC, next time we’ll know exactly who can do what. And we’ll have better answers for the questions that victims ask.”

If you call Jill Davidson at Beacon of Hope, 239-283-5123, pay close attention to the music while you are on hold. “Sorry Charley” is a catchy tune about an unwelcome visitor that pretty much says it all.

Preparation was the biggest lesson learned for David Troxler’s organization. It came at a high price. “People thought it couldn’t happen here,” said Troxler, pastor of the First Christian Church in Daytona Beach. “I had been trying to get people prepared for years. We lost two members of our congregation during the hurricane. Now people are listening.”

When Charley hit, First Christian Church participated in cleanup and volunteered its facility as short-term housing for hurricane victims. A year later, this pastor’s small inner-city congregation still struggles as a result of Hurricane Charley. When asked what he sees for the future, he can only sigh, “I wish I knew.” Maybe subconsciously he really does know. Now, instead of housing hurricane victims, the church hosts a steady stream of volunteers from all over the country who come to help the area rebuild.

Contact: David Troxler, Pastor of First Christian Church in Daytona Beach, 386-252-6648

Charley's impact changed lives far beyond Florida. Prior to August 2004, Camp Noah was a part-time endeavor by the Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota and Lutheran Disaster Response. It became a full-time job with a national director and partners across the country.

Melanie Davis holds the newly created leadership position. “Since Charley hit, we have been very busy, to say the least,” noted Davis from her office in St. Paul. “We have expanded to take the camp all over—to affected areas of the U.S. and in Puerto Rico.”

An outgrowth of the 1997 Midwest flooding, Noah is a weeklong camp that offers emotional and spiritual recovery for children in disasters. It also provides a much needed break for parents faced with the time-consuming chore of rebuilding a family's life.

– more –
The experience increases a child's coping skills and releases many of his or her trauma symptoms. It enables kids to make sense of what has happened to them. A new database being compiled by Camp Noah's parent organization will give further proof of its effectiveness. "We are seeing some cool stuff. Wonderful outcomes, very positive," said Davis.

Camp Noah is presented in Florida by Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota and its partner Lutheran Services Florida/Lutheran Disaster Response. Contact: Cathryn Stewart in Florida at 941-962-6606, or Melanie Davis at 800-987-0061. www.campnoah.org.

On the organizational chart for Adventist Disaster Response, Richard Bradley’s name could be found under the heading Mass Feeding Coordinator. In a time of need, he would be responsible for warehousing food and keeping large numbers of people from going hungry. Before Aug.13, 2004, the title didn’t seem to mean all that much. Due to restructuring and staff changes, he was the only person in his volunteer group’s disaster network and, looking back, he describes their ability to respond as “desperate.”

When Hurricane Charley blasted ashore, Bradley was in Wisconsin helping 30,000 scouts gathered as part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church youth ministry. He jumped on the first plane to Florida, thinking, “What little capacity we did have was in Wisconsin at the scout camp.” All that remained in Florida were three small chuck wagons—little trailers designed to feed scouts on camp-outs.

“Organizations were stretched beyond belief,” Bradley remembers, referring to the groups that responded during the 2004 hurricane season. “Nineteen million meals were served in a state that has a total population of 17 million. We were at the start of the largest volunteer effort in the history of the United States.”

The lack of preparation had come back to haunt them, but the Adventist Disaster Response did just that. It responded—in a big way. Richard Bradley was about to earn his title of Mass Feeding Coordinator. With a new mobile kitchen, his volunteers would go on to serve 80,000 meals. After becoming director of Adventist Disaster Response, he was responsible for warehousing and distributing all donated food coming into Florida.

Bradley looks back on the changes Hurricane Charley brought to his church’s ability to serve. In 2005 they acquired three new mobile kitchens, each capable of feeding 10,000 meals a day. They also have a brand new mobile command post. “We have four times the capacity we did a year ago. We are better connected to our national organization—better coordinated. And, there is a new dedication to preparedness.”

Change also came on a personal level. Before Hurricane Charley, Richard Bradley was a private contractor. He now works with FEMA at the Florida Long Term Recovery Office as a volunteer agency liaison. Contact: Richard Bradley at 407-858-6434

For information on SERT go to www.floridadisaster.org; For FEMA, go to www.fema.gov.
To donate to the relief effort, please visit www.FLAHurricaneFund.com.