

When Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast earlier this year, the Friends University community didn't hesitate to help.

# AN OUTPOURING OF SUPPORT

## FRIENDS UNIVERSITY RESPONDS TO HURRICANE VICTIMS

BY ERIN O'DONNELL

Perhaps because the magnitude of the disaster was so vast, the relief that poured forth took many forms. For some, a small cash donation was a sacrifice, but they gave it freely. Others who were touched by the tragedy gave something even more precious to the victims – their time.

The University's official donation drive raised \$2,240 in cash and filled a van with supplies, said organizer Connie Reimer, chair of the Religion and Humanities Division. All donations went to Dillon's and the American Red Cross for distribution.

Reimer said she knew many people on campus were searching for a way to help, but that they felt overwhelmed by the scale of need.

"I just thought it was the right thing to do," Reimer said. "I could have sent a check, but it seemed like students, faculty and staff needed an opportunity to give."

Reimer acted within days of the disaster, sending out donation requests via e-mail. The drive lasted approximately a week. "If you have an initial reaction to something like that, then I think you get more of a response," she said.

One of the largest donors was the Edmund Stanley Library, which donated \$900 from its annual book sale to the cause, said Assistant Library Director Max M. Burson.

At the Lenexa Educational Center, the Kansas City Alumni Advisory Board led a food drive challenge in October. Students in 15 classes competed to see who could contribute the most. Organizational Management and Leadership cohort number 309 collected 128 food items and were treated to a pizza party in November. In all, more than 460 food items were collected and donated to the Salvation Army.

In Fine Arts, students and staff took a different approach. They opted to help fellow music students in the affected area, knowing that arts programs wouldn't be top priority in schools struggling to rebuild.



Senior Matt May, senior Brianna Brown, junior Jessica Johnson and freshman Lauren Hett package donated Singing Quaker dresses and marching band uniforms for shipment to schools in Pass Christian, Miss.

The Singing Quaker women are getting new dresses this year, and senior Brianna Brown suggested they donate the old dresses to schools stricken by the hurricane, said Amber Harshbarger, administrative assistant in Fine Arts.

"Brianna said she'd heard girls talk about throwing the old ones away," Harshbarger said. "She hated to think of them going on a trash heap somewhere."

So Harshbarger e-mailed their idea to the Louisiana and Mississippi chapters of the Music Educators Association. David

Chavers, music director for the schools in Pass Christian, Miss., was the first to reply. Their high school colors are red, white and blue, and the bright red Singing Quaker dresses were a perfect fit.

About 25 dresses have been donated by alumni, and the department began collecting old band uniforms to send as well.

"David said they'd be glad not to do their first concert in jeans," Harshbarger said. "It will make such a difference to put their choirs on stage and say, 'This is something normal again.'"

"Normal" is a relative term in the lives of the people Patsy Zaruba sees in her job. The master's student in marriage and family therapy works with drug addicts at the Wichita Treatment Center.

Within days of Katrina's assault, her boss asked if she would be able to help at a methadone clinic in Baton Rouge. Five New Orleans clinics were submerged in the flooding, sending scores of patients to Baton Rouge for their next dose of methadone, a treatment for addiction to opiates, or heroin.

After Zaruba agreed to go, she learned she might have nowhere to stay. "I felt this was a God thing," she said, "and I left on a plane with my sleeping bag, pillow and luggage to stay at least a week."

When she arrived, the clinic was in chaos. Lines of addicts in severe withdrawal stretched into the street. In Zaruba's capacity as a "guest doser," she assessed patients and heard their

harrowing stories of loss and survival. Most often, they told her, "we lost everything," "we swam for our lives," or "we can't find family members."

Even in the midst of misery, Zaruba said she consistently saw God at work. Down the street from the clinic, three large crosses stood in a cemetery. One man suffering from withdrawal was told to look for the crosses, keep going and there would be someone to help him.

"How powerful that God was giving them signs," Zaruba said. "I was honored to work with this group, as addicts are sometimes forgotten."

Some of those at Friends who were most deeply affected by the tragedy had personal ties to the Gulf Coast.

Kathy Edwards, media circulation coordinator at the Library, heard of the hurricane's devastation from her best friend, a New Orleans resident. The story inspired Edwards to take up a collection from family members and forward the proceeds to the University's fund drive.

Information Services staff member Anne Baer spent several agonizing days in Topeka waiting for news with her daughter-in-law, Myra, whose family is spread throughout Louisiana and Mississippi. "It was almost a week before Myra and her family located a sister who was air-lifted from her home in Gulfport," Baer said.

Her co-workers supported her emotionally during that difficult time, Baer said, and even helped send supplies south to

## KATRINA SURVIVOR JOINS TOPEKA STAFF

BY ERIN O'DONNELL

Stephanie March fled New Orleans in August with four pairs of jeans, three shirts, two daughters, one son and not much else.

Two months later, March was working as an office manager at the Friends University Topeka Center. Her daughters were enrolled in school. They came home every night to their own apartment. They even had a TV to watch.

For this Hurricane Katrina survivor, life is slowly getting back to normal, even if it is forever changed.

"I've been independent, on my own and providing for my family by myself since I've been divorced," March said. "It really pulled the rug from under my feet when this happened. To lose everything makes you feel less than human."

March's road to Kansas and to Friends began shortly before Katrina took deadly aim at her city. She evacuated to Baton Rouge, about 60 miles north, confident she and her family would be home in a few days.

"I thought I'd stay at my grandmother's and go back to work on Monday," said March, who was a secretary at a Lutheran church.

"We expected wind, no electricity, rain and flooding. We thought we'd have maybe a foot of water in the house. We

didn't think we'd have water as tall as the interstate."

March hasn't been back to survey the damage to her home in the Gentilly area, but she knows what happened. "My mother said the first floor was ruined, and the second floor was looted."

Soon March knew she would be going forward and not back. Her ex-husband



suggested she come to Topeka, where his family lives. There, she wouldn't have to fight the crowds of evacuees competing for limited resources, as was the case in overcrowded Baton Rouge.

She arrived in late September, almost a month after the hurricane. "Topeka had open arms and agencies ready to help, and they have helped," March said.

Organizations such as the Salvation Army and the American Red Cross helped provide March's family with everything from clothing and food to furniture and housing. Within a few weeks, she found her job at Friends through Weststaff temporary agency. But it has been up to March to provide her children — ages 4, 7, and 12 — with comfort and stability as they move forward one day at a time.

From the beginning, March said she's been grateful to have survived with her family safe; everything else is replaceable. But children don't always understand that — March's eldest daughter was crushed to think the posters she just bought for her room were ruined.

"As a mom, I'm thinking how it will affect their emotional state," she said. "I've realized I have to be patient. I can't get frustrated with them because they're frustrated too."

March said she is glad her children have some structure and support back in their lives, but she is still working to piece together a new network for herself.

"This has been a real test of faith and character. Faith has played the biggest part of all," she said. "Being able to talk to friends and family has helped, but nothing can replace the hug of a mom or the smile on a friend's face."