



Ike volunteers get back to work

Penny LeLeux, The Record Newspapers
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Even though not as visible, there are still hundreds of people coming in a steady flow to Orange County helping those that have no other means of repairing their homes after Hurricane Ike.

The staff of the Fuller Center Disaster Rebuilders (FCDR), just one of many nonprofits still rebuilding Orange County, took off for various parts of the United States to spend Christmas vacation with their families, but it is back to work this week.

Six interns from the University of Cincinnati are joining them. The students are studying architecture and urban planning and will gain valuable experience in the construction field working at the home sites.

FCDR will have a very busy first week back with a total of 92 volunteers and staff members making up a diversified group.

Volunteers include: 11 from AmeriCorps, 11-California Lutheran University, 12-St. John Lutheran Church in Nazareth, Pa., 15 from Bethel Lutheran Church in Rochester, Minn, 24 -New Jersey Pines, one from Faith Lutheran Church, Readsville, Wis., two from Answering the Call Together (ACT) and three from Habitat for Humanity. Most volunteers come for a week, but some will stay longer; working with new volunteers from other states.

Volunteers are housed and fed through several area organizations and congregations. Orange First Church of the Nazarene partnered with FCDR and provides their base of operations.

Since FCDR came to Orange County in June, 2009, they have finished four houses; are currently working on seven more, with at least 20 on the waiting list.

"FCDR is grateful to these volunteers, many who had been working for victims of Hurricane Katrina in Mississippi before joining the FCDR in Texas," said Gretchen Hyneckeal. "Without them, many Hurricane Ike victims would not be getting back into their houses."

Gretchen and husband, Bob, are the operations manager and site coordinator for the group.

They managed to spend time with each of their six children over the holidays, traveling to several states.

"We left on the 18th. It was a good thing, the next day everyone had 24 inches of snow," said Gretchen. "If we had waited until the next day, we wouldn't be able to get where we wanted."

Sharing the holidays with all their children is not always possible as the Hyneckeals have volunteered and traveled all over the country in a motor home since 1997.

"It has been a good time of renewal in order to continue rebuilding for victims of Hurricane Ike," said Mrs. Hyneckeal.

Committing to serve Bridge City for two years; the Hyneckeals sold their motor home in November. The couple now resides in a rental home near the high school.

Other staff members scattered to New Jersey, Virginia, New York, Georgia and Maine for the holidays, but are now ready to get back to the work of rebuilding.

The Fuller Center (founded by Millard Fuller) originated as a group from Habitat for Humanity that went to Mississippi shortly after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast on Aug. 29, 2005. They spent three years building and rehabbing 96 homes there.

The organization came to Orange County to do the same for Bridge City and the Orange area. FCDR targets families who didn't qualify for government grants for one reason or another; who don't have access to conventional financing; or who do not have the wherewithal to oversee or pay a contractor themselves.

If any individual or organization would like to help in any way, it would be appreciated.

You can call (409) 670-0544 to schedule a time to volunteer; skills not required.

"Our house leaders are adept at teaching and leading," said Gretchen.

Financial assistance is always appreciated and needed. Besides administrative costs, they need money for gasoline, vehicle maintenance, building materials, tool maintenance and food for volunteers. Donations may be sent to FCDR, 3810 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Orange, TX 76632.