

ROLLINS COMMUNITY HELPS REBUILD HOMES DESTROYED BY HURRICANE KATRINA

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As part of the Rollins Relief program, a student global service organization committed to helping in local and international relief efforts, 44 members of the Rollins community recently volunteered with Habitat for Humanity in St. Bernard Parish in Louisiana.

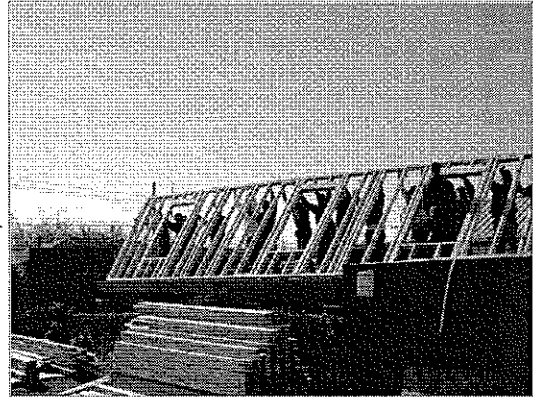
For five days, 38 students and six faculty and staff members worked on the interior and exterior of three homes. Work included framing, siding, clearing debris, installing insulation, painting and hanging doors in the houses which were destroyed when the Mississippi River bypass canal levees failed to hold back the Gulf of Mexico during and following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

Students on the trip were part of an Intersession course on "Recovery and Regeneration: Restoring New Orleans" taught by Associate Professor of Environmental Studies and Rollins Relief Faculty Advisor Joe Siry. The group traveled by bus overnight to and from Rollins to St. Bernard Parish and stayed five nights in Camp Hope, a middle school not severely damaged by the Hurricane. "In the camp, 30 men or 30 women sleep in a room either on cots or in sleeping bags," said Siry. "Cold cement floors are complemented by cold showers and a high carbohydrate diet fit for growing, athletic adults." Camp Hope is the only residential facility in the country run by Habitat for Humanity with the sole purpose of rebuilding the Ninth Ward, Musician's Village and St. Bernard Parish. The Camp is in a guarded and secure facility, with curfews and quiet hours that are set and enforced.

"Students were able to meet and speak with residents of the homes they worked on," Siry said. "In addition, Rollins faculty, staff and students took up a collection for one of the residents to assist her in purchasing the appliances she lost in the flood." The goal of the trip was to combine the experiential service with the academic readings and writings for each student to understand the scope of this ongoing tragedy. "This was a brief sort of sweet taste of New Orleans and a bitter taste of what it would then take to regenerate the communities that sustain the neighborhoods lost to the flood."

The group also visited Preservation Hall, a New Orleans institution dedicated to reviving and playing original jazz quartet music. The theme of the class was to see the cultural pieces of New Orleans in the setting of destruction and debris that still can be viewed in the Ninth Ward and extensive parts of St. Bernard Parish. "The paintings of Roland Williams at the New Orleans Museum of Art and the photographs of Robert Pollidori taken after the flood at the Ogden Museum were among the most moving and difficult compositions to see because they captured the dramatic despair and resilience needed for a recovery, often side by side," Siry said.

Since March 2006, Rollins Relief has sponsored seven relief trips with close to 170 students, faculty and staff journeying to St. Bernard Parish, which is located near New Orleans, to assist with the rebuilding of the region. Rollins Relief is creating more opportunities to serve and lead, including additional trips to Louisiana and South Florida, a course that will explore the effects of disasters on the environment through chemistry and physics and local community hurricane preparedness. The goal of the program is to provide students with an affordable opportunity to do relief and recovery work, locally and regionally.



Rollins students, faculty and staff help build a Habitat for Humanity home in St. Bernard Parish in Louisiana.