

Tornado Relief Efforts

By: Emily Killian

Driving out to the sight in Volusia County after what seemed like an eternity on the interstate, my eyes fought to stay open. I hadn't slept in 36 hours. As we pulled up in front of the barren lot with what is left of a dilapidated home, trees bent, toys and keepsakes littering the ground, sleep is suddenly the furthest thing from my mind.

This was the sight we all experienced Saturday, February 17th, as we prepared for a long afternoon of hauling tree branches and debris from the remnants of the Stamper's now half-story home. We were welcomed by Mrs. Stamper, the grateful wife and mother of the family that had fallen victim to the tornado. She told us the story of her husband and daughter coming downstairs from the top story of the house seconds before the wind ripped the roof off of the house. As we listened to the horror of the torrential storm, finding family members in trees, and waiting helplessly for someone to find the family the next morning, we were told that the mound we were standing on was the new gravesite for the family dog that had been strangled by his own leash during the cyclone.

After hearing what the family had been through, we were more than happy to help in whatever capacity we could. The fellow boy scouts of the youngest Stamper hauled logs, neighbors pulled nails from salvaged wood, and Rollins' friends and faculty towed branches to the trash pile. The work was tough and as the afternoon wore on, the sun began to take its toll, but a kinship was created between all of us there as we helped each other clear the disaster area.

There was one enormous pile of debris. It was roughly the size of a Honda CRV and it was made up of trunks that were as thick as my legs that were snarled in these long, snakelike branches. Andrea Williamson and I were tugging at the pile, just hoping to get one branch loose, when a teenaged boy we didn't know came over and started pulling with us. He was followed by a middle-aged man, and before we knew it seven people were all trying to get this pile cleared. With the help of a chainsaw, we finally got the enormous heap to the edge of the dump pile and smiled, each of us with a distinct feeling of accomplishment. Ultimately, we were nine strangers seeing a need and doing our part to fulfill it. This kind of moment happens more than cynics like me like to think, but almost always go unnoticed.

We were later told that the work that we did saved the homeowners \$12,000 in repairs. It was 5 and hours of our lives that made all the difference in the world to the Stamper family. Now that I think about it, I didn't hear a single complaint from anyone that entire day. Seeing the community rally around this family in their time of need was incredible and sadly, all it took was a disaster to bring out the service and compassion within us.