



behind the hammer

STORIES AND IDEAS ABOUT PEOPLE CONNECTING THROUGH MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE



Setting tile with a smile

Ernie Wiens (left) and Otto Braun, Edmonton, AB, set tile in the home of a man whose face and arm were burned during the August fires in British Columbia.

Volunteers happy with peculiar gift of service

by Carla Hunt
Assistant Coordinator

An old Sunday School song, “Do Young Children Love the Lord?” includes the phrase, “some folks think that we’re **peculiar**, we are **happy**, hallelujah.”

This anthem is also well-suited to the peculiar individuals who serve with MDS. Webster’s dictionary defines “peculiar” as different, odd, curious, eccentric and strange.

The commitment of MDS volunteers often appears to be a bit strange. Volunteers are asked, “Why are you here? Why would you willingly leave your home, family, friends, church and perhaps your job to give your time, skills and love to serve strangers?” **Peculiar.**

MDS is also a bit peculiar in comparison to other disaster-reponse agencies. In this age of litigation, many agencies no longer take the risk of sending, managing and caring for volunteers. During 2003, MDS has sent volunteers to more

than 20 communities. **Peculiar.**

Titus 2:14 (Amp) best defines the peculiarity and the motivation of MDS volunteers. . . . “Who gave Himself on our behalf that He might redeem us (purchase our freedom) from all iniquity and purify for Himself a people [to be peculiarly His own, people who are] eager and enthusiastic about [living a life that is good and filled with] beneficial deeds.” **Peculiar, indeed!**

This issue of *Behind the Hammer* is about the peculiar people who volunteer and why they serve with MDS. This issue also explores some of the challenges and obstacles associated with running a volunteer organization in 2003.

As you read this issue, we encourage you to reflect on your own peculiar involvement with this organization. How did you first become involved with MDS? What has prompted you to support the mission of an organization that responds to disaster survivors in need?

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Disaster Viewpoint

by Tom Smucker
Executive Coordinator

The excellent reputation of MDS

I received a call today asking, “Will MDS please help a family in Indiana? They will only trust the Mennonites.”

As I conclude six years as MDS executive coordinator, I reflect on scores of communities where disasters have struck and hundreds of meetings where recovery plans have been discussed. In relating to these communities, I have been humbled by the praise that MDS receives for the work of our volunteers. I am often asked, “How do you do it? How can you get good quality people to volunteer disaster after disaster? Won’t MDS please help my community?”

Thanks to our volunteers

When I am asked these questions it reinforces the quality that communities and organizations see and expect in the MDS volunteers. What sets you apart from the other volunteers? I think most of you know that answer. You are trusted, dependable, reliable, honest, unselfish, hardworking, caring, and Christian.

Thanks to our faith

Communities notice a difference in volunteers whose giving is based on the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament. MDS responds in dozens of communities each year, making it possible for thousands of volunteers to reach out to persons in a disastrous situation. As our volunteers minister across North America in the name of Christ, few people consider these servants to be missionaries. Yet each volunteer is a mission statement that communicates through action. Our first testimony is our presence in a community. Before the work begins, we communicate our faith through the act of showing up. Our second testimony is the love and care that we share.

The Anabaptists are a small denomination, but the love and care that we share makes a difference in this world. That difference should be a challenge to all of us to continue.

Thanks to you

Serving as the executive coordinator of MDS has been a privilege. Your support and encouragement has been invaluable to me as we have worked together to meet the needs of the clients and volunteers.

See page 6 for a tribute to Smucker’s time with MDS.

And they all work for free?



by Lois Nickel
Administrative Coordinator

When I interviewed with MDS, my former coworkers asked what MDS does. I answered briefly, “They collect people to help where a disaster has occurred.” It sounded simple. After two months in my new job, I understand MDS is more complex.

The number of volunteers, the places they come from, the age range, the church affiliations, and the frequency of service are simply amazing. There are thousands of people across North America who find volunteering invigorating, meaningful, rewarding and fun. These wonderful people “sign up” with MDS to give precious time to a cause they believe in, to find adventure, and to make new friends.

But who is an MDS volunteer? The obvious person is one who travels to the disaster site and shovels mud or pounds nails into the frame of a new home. I would now like to highlight others in the large MDS family.

Some of the first volunteers I met were board members. There are dozens of visionary North Americans who work hundreds of hours for MDS (phone calls, letters, e-mails, meetings, public speaking, etc.). MDS would be a non entity without this group of special people.

The next group of volunteers I met were mailers. These talented, patient people come to the office to fold letters, stuff envelopes, and apply postage. They have a grand time fellowshiping as they prepare communication packages to keep us all informed.

On my first visit to an MDS project, I discovered that MDS would be a disaster without cooks. Try mudding drywall all day without breakfast, lunch, or supper. At every project I visited the volunteers were nourished with delicious food. The cooks were gracious, friendly, and worked very hard all day in their kitchens.

Who answers the phone when you call an MDS project? Who schedules volunteers, pays the bills, answers e-mails, and writes the weekly web reports? The skills of the office manager keep the project safe from disarray.

I could go on to highlight mechanics, gophers, community workers, meeting planners, congregational contact people, spouses, and all those who pray for MDS. The list seems endless once you begin to see how MDS carries its mandate out. I know I will continue to be amazed by each and every person who helps out in some way to support the “people who go to the disaster and help out.”



Gerald Klassen

by Angelika Dawson

Gerald Klassen talks about a man he met through MDS, a man whose house was damaged by tornadoes that raged through Jackson, Tenn. last year. From the road, the man's house looks fine. It still has shingles on the roof. But inside the house is a mess and the man has lost everything.

"When you lose everything, the pain is so great," Gerald says. "As we talked about his house, he shared that his wife had passed away . . . He had tears in his eyes. It became an opportunity to touch that, to share prayer and minister."

Gerald and his wife Doreen have been ministering in this way with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) for the past 12 years. This volunteer work and Gerald's service with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Auxiliary in Burns Lake, have led them to receive the Governor General's "Caring Canadian Award."

"We were shocked and surprised," Gerald said, describing their feelings when they got the news. "We thought it must be a mistake! We just do this because we enjoy it, and it just happens to be a volunteer thing.

"We get to meet so many people, we come to a project for a few months and meet people in similar work. The peers, the other volunteers, the victims. It's just rewarding and fulfilling - it's good for us!"

The Klassens have a long history of ministry. They were the pastoral couple in Waldheim, Sask. for three years and at First Mennonite Church in Burns Lake for seven years. After they completed their ministry, they were not ready for another

MDS couple receive award in British Columbia for commitment to volunteer service



Doreen Klassen

pastorate, so they opened a restaurant. It was during this time that Gerald got to know several of the RCMP officers

in Burns Lake and one suggested that he volunteer with the auxiliary. He laughs when I ask him about that experience.

"Ya, I bet you're wondering how does a Mennonite pastor get involved with that!" he chuckles. But his responsibilities opened his eyes to a side of the community that he didn't realize was there. Gerald patrolled nights with an RCMP officer and often responded to reports of violence and substance abuse. It was with these people that he developed close ties.

"I became like a dad to . . . these young guys," he says.

Volunteering with MDS was a natural step after their pastoral ministry and their restaurant business. They had experience in construction and the fact that they could do MDS together was appealing. When they arrive at a site like Jackson, Doreen is the hostess. She greets other volunteers and shows them their living quarters and is responsible for their needs. She is also responsible

for administrative work. Gerald supervises the volunteers and participates in the rebuilding of homes.

Both Gerald and Doreen say that the spirit of volunteering was modeled for them at home. Both came from caring families who responded to need in practical ways.

"Our door was always open," Doreen says.

"My siblings and I are adopted, so that tells you something about my parents right there," Gerald says. "And we always had foster kids, all the time. In that sense, volunteering - giving - was modeled for us."

"The peers, the other volunteers, the victims. It's just rewarding and fulfilling - it's good for us!"

Gerald Klassen



Leadership workshop participant Paul Bowers (left) discusses a home repair with workshop leaders Jim Shelly and Carla Hunt. Bowers attended the October 2003 workshop in Jackson, Tenn.

March leadership workshop

MDS hosts free training workshops for long-term volunteers interested in leadership positions. The workshops provide technical and informal instruction to build on the servant attitude, people skills, wisdom, compassion, flexibility and good humor of registrants. The goal of the multi-day seminars is to prepare leaders for the team-oriented approach of MDS.

The next workshop will be held March 17-19, 2004 in British Columbia. Individuals interested in participating may contact either MDS office (contact info on page 7).

Leaders make the difference

by **Carla Hunt**
Assistant Coordinator

Many thanks to the MDS volunteers who are leaders at the project sites - the project directors, office manager, construction supervisors, crew leaders and cooks. You are the heart of MDS for our clients and our weekly volunteers.

We know there are more of you out there who are potential leaders. Luke 12:35 (NLT) encourages us to “be dressed for service and well prepared.” If you are clothed in abilities and knowledge to fulfill leadership assignments, we want to help you become well prepared.

If you have never been out to an MDS project, you may want to try serving for a week or two to learn more about MDS. Take time to observe the leaders and the work that they do. Explain that you are considering being an MDS leader and ask the who, what, where, when and why questions.

We also invite you to attend a leadership workshop like the one coming up in March. Our last workshop in Jackson included new volunteers and experienced veterans. These workshops provide a unique opportunity to share and learn from each other.

You can also grow as a leader by asking for a mentor. We have experienced leaders who are willing to spend a week or two on site with new leaders to walk beside you as you adjust to your responsibilities.

As you consider your own potential as a leader, shoulder tap others you know who could join you in your desire to learn more about leadership opportunities with MDS.

MDS 2004 All-Unit Meeting Abbotsford, BC February 13 and 14, 2004

Join us in Abbotsford this February for the 2004 MDS All-Unit Meeting.

The MDS BC Unit is hosting the gathering with the theme of “Responding, Rebuilding and Restoring.” In the spirit of MDS, all guests will be offered the opportunity to stay in a BC home.

Registration information can be found online at mds.mennonite.net or by contacting one of the MDS binational offices (contact info on page 7). Deadline January 10, 2004.

**RESPONDING
 REBUILDING
 RESTORING**



After being turned away at the Montana border, Saskatchewan residents Frieda Rempel (left) and Edna Zacharias (center) changed their volunteer plans from Pinedale, Ariz. to Barriere, B.C. In Barriere the two women volunteered in the kitchen under the direction of Marge Friesen (right) from Carman, Manitoba. Here the women prepare Varenikje, a traditional Russian-Mennonite dish that is boiled and served with farmer's sausage.

A border between two nations of volunteers

Get your passports ready and watch what you say - it is not getting any easier to cross the border between the United States and Canada. With color-coded threat levels indicating the probability of terrorist attacks on US soil, border crossing guards are taking their jobs as seriously as luggage inspectors in airport terminals. The increased vigilance has often placed the clamp on the wrong people, turning away well-intentioned volunteers who wish to cross the border in order to serve. Those who have been turned back at the border have experienced disappointment and frustration. Their good intentions of giving their time and skills to help at a disaster site were thwarted.

The issue of getting volunteers across the border is no small matter for MDS when you consider the number of Canadian volunteers who travel south each year to serve. While the majority of all MDS projects are located in the United States, twenty-eight percent of all MDS volunteers come from Canada! Between January 1, and November 17, 2003, 415 Canadian volunteers served with MDS. While some of those volunteers did not need to cross the border in order to serve at the Barriere project, a significant number of them did cross the border to serve in Northfork, Jackson, Pinedale, Big Timber, Columbus and other projects as well.

Without the open border, our contribution in these communities would have been significantly reduced.

An open border is just as critical for the leadership of MDS. Because Canadian volunteers make up an astonishing forty-three percent of MDS leaders, the organization relies heavily on border crossings to keep our projects running in North America.

Border crossing suggestions

Listed below are suggestions for better success at the border. Please remember the border official has the final say and even by following these ideas you are not guaranteed entry.

Contact the Winnipeg or Akron office to obtain a letter that will introduce you, your disaster site destination and the length of your assignment.

Be prepared to show your passport. If you do not have a passport, be sure to take a government-issued photo (driver's license) and your birth certificate. Passports may become mandatory in the near future.

Be polite and friendly, but do not offer more information than what you are asked. If you need to explain the nature of your visit, always explain that you are a volunteer, not a worker. If your credibility is questioned, share the letter.

Carefully consider where to cross. The smaller, more rural crossings have sometimes been problematic. If in doubt contact an MDS office for advice before you travel.



Throughout his time with MDS, Tom Smucker has repeatedly used a watchful eye, a caring heart and a listening ear. Left to right, in 1993 Smucker surveys angle iron hammered into a tree by Hurricane Andrew (MCC photo by Rich Preheim), in 2000 he greets a client at the dedication of her new home built by MDS and in 2003 he listens to the concerns of Project Director Menno Unger while visiting the MDS project in Barriere, British Columbia.

Kevin King to replace Tom Smucker as executive coordinator

by Ted Houser
Communications Coordinator

AKRON Pa. -- MDS is pleased to announce the hire of Kevin King who will join the volunteer relief organization as executive coordinator on February 1, 2004.

With twelve years experience as material resources manager for Mennonite Central Committee, King comes acquainted with the broad spectrum of Anabaptist constituents whose donor and volunteer resources support MDS.

King hopes that under his direction MDS will further increase the diversity of those constituents.

“Many North American disasters impact communities of ethnic diversity,” says King. “In serving these communities, I would feel better if our boards reflected the changing face of North America.”

King believes that MDS volunteer experience encourages young people in the church to broaden their worldview. “I hope MDS can seek ways to increase opportunities for young people to serve and learn more about current economic, social and political factors,” says King.

King holds a master’s degree in Economic Development from Eastern College. He also earned a bachelor’s in Agricultural Development from Eastern Mennonite College. From 1992 to the present, King worked as MCC material resources manager. He currently serves on the Board of Food Resource Bank, Kalamazoo, Mich. King served with MCC in Brazil for 3 years and in Jamaica for 4 years.

“I’ve experienced disaster everywhere I went!” says King, referring to a drought in Brazil and a hurricane in Jamaica.

“I am looking forward to working with an organization that is grassroots, made up of ‘can-do’ type people who ‘work

out their salvation with fear and trembling.” says King. “MDS has an excellent reputation near and wide and I hope to maintain that. I would also hope that MDS could strengthen its linkages to other Mennonite agencies when responding to communities affected by disasters.”

King and his wife Karen live in Lititz, Pa. and attend Akron Mennonite with their children, Justin and Andrea.

MDS announced plans to hire King following board action taken on Sept. 27 to approve his nomination by a seven-member search committee.

King will replace the current MDS executive coordinator, Tom Smucker, who has accepted a position with a local business in the Akron area. Smucker served with MDS for over 12 years, leading the organization as executive coordinator since 1997. During his tenure, Smucker worked to grow the voluntary service program.

“MDS feeds the service arm of the church with volunteer opportunities for all types of people with all sorts of skills,” says Smucker. “With disaster response MDS is able to meet the needs of both the survivor and the volunteer.”

With increased volunteer interest in longer service assignments, Smucker strengthened the long-term presence of MDS in disaster communities. By improving volunteer accommodations and care, Smucker fueled a trend of volunteers who desire to serve for 12 months or more at a time.

“It all becomes worth it when you hear the testimonies that these volunteers share as they return to their home congregations,” says Smucker. “I have experienced tremendous joy observing people in the church pew connect with disaster survivors - MDS is able to empower that connection.”

From an administrative perspective, Smucker supported the increase in long-term volunteer opportunities by expanding staff in the MDS Akron office and opening a new office in Winnipeg to better support the needs of Canadian volunteers.





Summary of binational MDS projects

MDS volunteers are putting on their gloves and caps in anticipation of a busy winter in Barriere, BC; Corpus Christi, TX; Jackson, TN; and Newport News, VA.

The MDS network is also monitoring fire damage in California and flood damage in British Columbia and Washington.

In **Jackson** volunteers are still repairing and rebuilding homes damaged by tornadoes. The MDS Jackson Project opened in May of 2003 after a violent storm system spawned close to 400 twisters. The town of Jackson was particularly hard hit when an F-4 tornado crossed through downtown commercial and residential areas. For more information about this project, please call (731) 664-5188.

In **Barriere** volunteers are putting the finishing touches on four new rebuilds. A wildfire tore through the North Thompson area in August of

2003. MDS is working in Barriere where hundreds lost their jobs after the disaster, when a burned sawmill did not reopen for business. For more information about this project, please call (250) 672-5666.

In **Newport News** MDS is gearing up to accept full crews of volunteers between the months of January and March. Coastal Areas of Virginia were heavily hit by flooding during Hurricane Isabel in September of 2003. Some of the greatest damage is in the community of Poquoson. For more information about this project, please call (757) 884-9356.

In **Corpus Christi** MDS is wading through a tough assortment of flood repair projects. A number of separate flooding incidents in 2002 contributed to this disaster.

Additional information about all of these projects is available online at mds.mennonite.net.



Cora Henning and her grandson sit on the foundation of an addition that Mennonite Disaster Service is building to replace a room that was blown away from her home during the Jackson tornado.

Get involved

connect locally with MDS

Region I Meeting: Oct. 2004

Bernard Martin, (540) 434-1916

Region II Meeting: Feb. 2004

Ottis Mast, (662) 738-5366

Region III Meeting : Nov. 19-20 2004

Vernon Miller, (316) 662-1584

Region IV Meeting: Sept. 2004

Wilmer Leichthy, (541) 928-8294

Region V: Nov. 2004

Gord Friesen, (204) 257-9048

behindthehammer

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Behind the hammer is published quarterly by the binational office of Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS). MDS is a non-profit agency that responds to the needs of disaster survivors. MDS volunteers cleanup, repair and rebuild damaged homes.

Behind the hammer is an opportunity for MDS volunteers, donors and clients to share about their common experience. Our stories encourage others to continue expressing the love of God through MDS.

We welcome your stories and ideas for print in this publication or for use online. Submit your ideas to Ted Houser, Editor, binational office.

Enjoy a free subscription. Contact the binational office to subscribe to this publication or notify MDS of an address change.

News updates from MDS projects are available by fax and E-mail or by calling 1-800-241-8111. You can visit us online at www.mds.mennonite.net for current photos and volunteer project information.



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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

behind the hammer

STORIES AND IDEAS ABOUT PEOPLE CONNECTING THROUGH MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE



Staff change
Kevin King (right)
will replace Tom
Smucker (left) as
MDS Executive
Coordinator,
effective February
1, 2004. For full story,
see page 6.