



# behind the hammer

STORIES AND IDEAS ABOUT PEOPLE CONNECTING THROUGH MENNONITE DISASTER SERVICE

## In Oklahoma, 2003 evokes memories from 1999

MDS Region III Vice Chair Bill Mast and Oklahoma Unit Chair Tim Shantz survey damage from two days of tornado activity in Oklahoma City. Fortunately, no one was killed by the May 8 and 9 storms. The last tornado to pass through Oklahoma City killed 44 people in 1999.



## 412 tornadoes draw response from 7 MDS units

Records were broken and lives were shattered when 412 tornadoes careened across 19 states during the first 10 days of May, 2003. The National Weather Service has never recorded more tornadoes over a 10-day period.

Ironically, the storm system that pulled the Midwest apart pulled MDS together. At least seven MDS units organized local grassroots volunteers for immediate response.

The severe storms made headlines on Sunday, May 4, when a large outburst of twisters leveled entire towns and scattered debris across Missouri, Kansas, Tennessee and Mississippi. As local MDS units jumped in to respond, the storm dealt two blows to Oklahoma City, one on Thursday and a second on Friday. By the end of the weekend, Illinois and Kentucky had also been hit. When the winds finally died down, forty-eight people were dead and thousands of homes were destroyed.

“Everywhere we look, it’s gone,” said MDS Region II Director Ottis Mast during a preliminary investigation in Denmark, Tenn. “We can’t even see where the houses were.”

In Missouri, 300 MDS volunteers loaded as many dump trucks with debris during the first week of response. Forty Kansas volunteers traveled to the southeast corner of the state to clean up in Crawford County. Eighty volunteers showed up at a dairy farm in Paris, Tenn. where the roof was torn from the barn.

Security measures in urban areas have made volunteer response more difficult in Oklahoma City and Kansas City. “We have been getting lots of calls of people who are raring to work,” said MDS Region III Vice Chair Bill Mast who asked volunteers to wait while he worked with city officials to find clients.

The strong turnout of volunteers in response to the May tornadoes is testament to the grassroots structure of the MDS network. While this recovery is sure to develop into binational MDS projects with overnight volunteer housing, it is important to remember that this MDS response began with local volunteers who reacted to the needs in their own backyards. The stories in this issue of *Behind the Hammer* focus on the grassroots initiative of MDS volunteers.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2: Disaster Viewpoint

3: More than Service

4-5: In My Backyard

6: Binational News

7: Region V Update



## Disaster Viewpoint

by Tom Smucker  
Executive Coordinator

On my bookshelf there are manuals with pages and pages of theory about the best procedures for disaster response. These details of recovery are important, but talking about them makes us blue in the face. In the end, everything boils down to a few key concepts. Disaster response does not happen until we get up, get out, get connected and get working.

### Get up

MDSers are not couch potatoes! When disasters strike, we get up and we get on the phone. Early contact with the MDS network keeps us all informed about where the damage has occurred and what we are going to do in response.

### Get out

The news media is one of our fastest sources of information. While reporters do a great job of alerting us to a situation, their assessments of need are not always accurate. Media often gravitates towards the stories that sell advertisements. Experienced MDSers get out and look for themselves. Seeing on TV may allow you to believe, but seeing it live helps you to understand. I recommend investigators work in pairs - two minds are often sharper than one.

### Get connected

When you respond to a disaster, you become the eyes and ears for the entire MDS network. The information that you gather helps all of us to respond. Connecting with people in the community allows us to get the facts about how many people have been affected and who needs the most help. My favorite question is, "Can you show me the destruction or work?" Local contacts will direct us to the need. Feeding this information back to the MDS network then allows more volunteers and resources involved.

### Get working

You make the most difference when you get to work. I like the phrase, "The hammer rings hope," because it illustrates the healing power of action. Your action can symbolize recovery during a time when someone is experiencing the worst disaster of their life. But the hammer does not ring hope unless you get behind it and swing. Once you have written permission from the client, get out there and do it. You are the working hands and feet of Christ!

## Locally owned MDS projects

by Nathan Koslowsky  
Administrative Coordinator

"You coordinate an MDS blood donor clinic?" I heard myself ask two MDS volunteers from Ontario. "MDS volunteers don't give blood, they swing hammers," I thought as Richard and Lois Hurst described their project.

"We run five clinics every year," related Lois. "About 180 donors come out every time," Richard added.

"Where, how, who...?" I had lots of questions which the Hurst's patiently answered one by one. The donors come from 13 churches that manage a small budget to rent a community hall and cover additional costs for the drive.

These types of small local MDS responses have the following large project qualities that help to maintain and develop the MDS networks from the grassroots on up:

1. Need driven: Local eyes and ears are best equipped to identify needs and locate nearby solutions.
2. Volunteer based: Leadership comes from within. This helps ensure ownership for implementation and follow through from local constituency.
3. Realistic in size: Local projects allow MDS networks to "stay in shape" for larger projects.
4. Cost effective: Funds raised and managed locally.

I believe we have much to learn about MDS from those volunteers who support the blood donor clinic in Ontario, another example of the diverse MDS constituency responding to the diversity of needs in our world in the name of Christ.

## A child responds to disaster

a poem by Carla Hunt,  
Inspired by Isaiah 6:8

Loneliness, isolation,  
Loss and grief.  
Catastrophes and storms.  
All out of my control.

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,  
"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"*

Soothing touch and gentle words,  
Standing up for others' rights.  
Bring the ladder,  
And run to give a helping hand.

*And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*

Shovels, hammers,  
Pails and brooms.  
What else can I do?  
I'll carry things from rooms.

## So much more than “serving in the name of Christ”

by Ashley Wahl, 22 year-old volunteer

WINNIPEG Man. -- I went on MDS because I felt God telling me to. Volunteers saved my family’s home during the flood of 1997. I knew there was no way to repay each one of them, but I felt that MDS would be a great way to do for someone else what had been done for me.

In 2001, I went to Princeville, N.C. for three weeks with MDS. I’m sure that many of you know the motto, “serving together in the name of Christ.” For me, MDS has always been so much more. “Serving, growing, fellowshiping, and learning together in the name of Christ.” That is how I describe MDS.

The volunteers in Princeville showed me how much fun could be had while praising God. I hadn’t experienced that kind of fellowship before. They helped open my eyes to what God was revealing to me. He was revealing the person that He wanted me to be - the person that I wanted to be, but was afraid to become. I was unsure of how to get there.

After I returned home from my trip to Princeville, I had an aching in me to strengthen my relationship with God. I wanted to learn more about Him, but I didn’t know where to go. I hadn’t attended Church regularly for almost 7 years, and I was petrified to walk through the doors alone.

A friend invited me to join her family on Sunday mornings. There were times I felt unworthy of going, but she always encouraged me and told me that God would not judge me for my past. I finally found a Church where I could walk through the front doors and feel at home and at ease.

In February of 2002 I went to the MDS project in Houston, Tex. during my university spring break. My parents had recently separated and I felt that going away would be a good refresher for me - a time to get away and strengthen my relationship with the Lord. I knew that if I got the same feeling I got in Princeville, this would be a very good thing for me to do. Sure enough, I was reminded of how God does not give us more than we can handle, and He is always there for us.

After I got home, my relationship with God continued to grow and prosper. My faith journey had some bumps along the way, but God was with me. No matter what I did, my heart always went back to wanting to do MDS more. In August of

2002, a friend asked me to go to Northfork, W. Va. with her youth group. I was quick to accept.

The youth group’s enthusiasm to work and fellowship together was an awesome thing to be a part of. This was a great time for me to expand my circle of friends. MDS has an amazing way of creating long-lasting friendships.

In January of this year I went down to Houston again, this time for two months. I felt God calling me to go,

and I needed that refresher feeling that MDS always gave me. MDS is a place where I knew I would share common interests with others, common goals, and a common feeling of wanting to help others. My life

had been through so many ups and downs. I knew that I needed a feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day.

Having gone through a flood myself, I could relate to what the homeowners were experiencing. I had many talks and was able to quickly find common ground. I should have told them that they helped me more than I helped them.

One woman taught me that even though life throws us curve balls, it’s all a part of God’s plan. MDS showed me that through a tragedy can come great joy. The joy of coming together in the name of Christ and helping one another is the most rewarding experience that I have ever had.

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**“Serving, growing, fellowshiping, and learning together in the name of Christ.” That is how I like to describe MDS.**

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Ashley Wahl, left, speaks out during one of many dinner conversations at the MDS project in Houston, Texas.

## Local response

Tips for early investigation and repair

In the immediate days following a disaster, it is normal for life to be hectic and confusing. When investigating or responding to a disaster in your own backyard, you may use these tips to provide the assistance and collect the information most helpful to disaster survivors and others within MDS.

### DO

- As time permits, notify MDS leaders of your plans to respond.
- Contact local authorities and identify who you are and why you are at the scene of the disaster.
- Prioritize your efforts. Human safety comes first! Direct those in need towards available resources.
- Look for opportunities to minimize secondary damage (i.e. covering punctured roofs with tarps, shoveling mud from homes).
- Keep a record of places you visit, services you offer and individuals you speak with.
- Take pictures to record damage.
- Report the things you learn to appropriate local authorities and others within the MDS network.

### DO NOT

- Identify yourself as an MDS representative unless you have been directed to respond by an MDS unit, regional or binational leader.
- Get in the way of, or compete with, other responders.
- Perform work without homeowner's written permission.
- Create false hope or make promises to provide assistance that you cannot complete yourself.
- Join the crowds that flock to disaster scenes as sightseers. Do not take pictures of human suffering.



Marilyn Hartman, Pike Mennonite Church, paints in the Lang home. Pike Mennonite Church adopted the Lang family (pictured in the inset) after the Nov. 10, 2002 tornadoes.

## Ohio church adopts family after twister

VAN WERT, Ohio -- After a tornado destroyed their double-wide home, Walter and Jean Lang purchased an old, run-down house at a Sheriff's sale. With plumbing that leaked and a heating system that needed repair, the Lang's feared that their new home was a mistake. MDS Western Ohio Unit President Randy Short introduced the Langs to volunteers from Pike Mennonite Church, Elida, Ohio. The church was looking for a family to adopt and assist on the evenings and weekends.

"They had been through a lot," said Jennie Good, coordinator for the mission committee at Pike Mennonite. "They needed some encouragement."

Eight weeks later, the Langs were on a first-name basis with over 25 volunteers and their home was safe and livable. "We have gotten just as much out of it as they have," said Good. "I'm sure!"

## Wildfires ignite Arizona Unit

PINEDALE, Ariz. -- The Arizona MDS Unit sprang to life after a wildfire raged through the Rodeo community last summer. Unit Vice Chair Freeman Hershberger organized early cleanup efforts and coordinated the winter reconstruction of a home in Pinedale.

As Hershberger responded in his own backyard, volunteers traveled from as far away as British Columbia and Maryland. "We have seen the homeowners change from discouragement to new hope," said Linda Gerber, Seattle, Wa.

Hershberger plans to begin construction on four additional homes in September of 2003. To support this project with financial or volunteer resources, contact Hershberger at (602) 467-9513.



Mark Hochstetler and Freeman Hershberger install kitchen cabinets in the Pinedale home.



Volunteer Jose Henriquez rips a shelf board with a circular saw while Bernard Martin steadies the end and coaches the process.



Felix Solano planes the edge of a piece of baseboard for the food pantry at the Evangelical Garifuna Church.

## Bronx volunteers support local community outreach

by Ted Houser, Communications Coordinator

NEW YORK -- After a few wobbly runs with a circular saw, Jose Alberto Henriquez smiled quietly, adjusted his grip and tried again - turning a board into a shelf in one smooth cut.

As a volunteer with MDS, Henriquez did not pause for frustration or lack of experience. Instead, the 24 year-old from the Bronx learned as he went, determined to acquire the skills necessary to make a difference in his home community. His shelf, now complete, holds canned food in the outreach center at the Evangelical Garifuna Church on Brook Avenue.

Henriquez joined MDS on March 24 when he and other local volunteers showed up at the church to learn carpentry skills and support the expansion of the 7 year-old food, shelter and clothing outreach. The three-day building blitz was sponsored by the MDS Restoring Hope Project.

MDS Region I Director, Bernard Martin, Harrisonburg, Va. and MDS community worker, Joe Steiner, Syracuse, N.Y. instructed the crew. Martin has been bringing outside volunteers into the city since Sept. 11. Together, Martin and Steiner decided that it was time to leave their skills in the city by training some local labor.

By the time Martin and Steiner left for home, the local volunteers were comfortably sawing, sanding and nailing the finishing touches on the expanded food storage and distribution facility. The improvements included new shelving, extra square footage, and a pick-up window.

"Before, we set all the food out on tables," said Celso Jaime, motioning towards a wall of spaghetti and canned

vegetables. "Now we have more control over the product." Jaime, pastor at Evangelical Garifuna Church, began the outreach center with the understanding that "Christianity is a day-to-day way of life, walking with the Lord."

Shaking hands and calling out to neighbors in the street, Jaime recognizes that the people of his community have both spiritual and physical needs. "The pantry and shelter at Evangelical Garifuna Church are ways to meet those needs and show them the Love of God," said Jaime.

The shelter holds up to eight residents and the distribution center is open to the community every other Wednesday to complement the income of individuals in need. But the hours of operation proved to be flexible as Jaime invited a deli-worker in to look at the renovations and sent a bag of groceries home with the garbage collector.

Hector Villanueva, a resident at the shelter, volunteered to help with the renovations. He was surprised by the pace of activity and pleased to have his name on the work. "I learned a lot," said Villanueva as he grinned and wiped some drywall dust from his brow.

Henriquez, pleased with his own skills, said that he would now like to volunteer with MDS outside of the city in response to a natural disaster.

The Restoring Hope Project is the MDS response to the emotional, economic and community needs of those in New York City and Washington D.C. who were affected by the Sept. 11 terror attacks.



Under the direction of MDS volunteers from North America, Chuukese laborers rebuild a storm-damaged home in Micronesia.

## Chuuk program extended

AKRON Pa. -- MDS is extending volunteer response to a July typhoon that destroyed homes in the Micronesian island state of Chuuk. Working with local labor, MDS volunteers constructed 40 homes between November, 2002 and April, 2003. A total of 231 homes are needed to complete the recovery.

MDS seeks healthy and adventuresome carpenters to serve in this unique location between April and Sept. Contact an MDS binational office for more information. A six week commitment and a portion of support costs are required.

## Nightclub is now Word of Truth

COLUMBUS Miss. -- Question: What happens when a nightclub owner becomes a Christian? Answer: She prays.

Shortly after the prayers began, Johnny Richardson, pastor at the Word of Truth Christian Center, approached the club owner and asked if she would be willing to sell her property. Willing? This was the opportunity she was praying for! Even the police were scared of her pink, windowless, drinking establishment. Adorned with a hand-painted silhouette of a naked woman, Jo Jo's Nightclub was the scene of the crime for three murders and a known hub for drug dealing and prostitution. Yes, she was willing to sell.

But why would anyone want to buy? Richardson saw potential. "My congregation is ready to get out and do some work in the community," said Richardson. In particular, they are ready to start a new church. After the Nov. 10, 2002 tornado destroyed their meeting place, the Word of Truth congregation decided to relocate in a community that would benefit from their presence. Jo Jo's was the perfect spot.

Richardson paid \$25K for the property before learning that the building was unfit for renovation. After spending another \$14K to tear the building down, the congregation ran into financial trouble. Gary Griffin, one of approximately 40 members, suggested that the Mennonites might be able to help. MDS was already rebuilding a home for Griffin's grandmother. Griffin spoke with MDS project director Jerry Klasen who agreed to use Mennonite volunteers from Macon and out of state to frame the new Word of Truth Christian Center.

"The Mennonites changed my congregation," said Richardson. The next time the Mennonites respond to a disaster in Mississippi, the Word of Truth congregation wants to help.

## Summer youth volunteers responding to flooded areas

Locals welcome overflowing streams of help in W. Va. and Minn.

ROSEAU Minn. -- Driving through the streets of her home community in Northern Minnesota, Tammy Brateng points to the green and red signs that mark the homes. A green sign means it is okay to move back in. A red sign indicates the house has been condemned. "My son canoed down this street the day after the dike broke," said Tammy. This summer, the sons and daughters of MDS families are traveling the same streets as they help those who were affected by flooding in 2002. Tammy is excited about the impact the MDS youth will make for the 109 families whose homes are still damaged.

For the second year in a row, MDS youth are also responding to flooding in Northfork, W. Va. Youth volunteer schedules are full at both the Roseau and Northfork projects.



Ben Funk and John Giesbrecht investigate flood damage in Roseau, Minn. where MDS youth groups are responding.



## Region V

### MDS extension office finds new home

by Gord Friesen, Region V Director

For the past two years the MDS extension office in Winnipeg has operated out of a windowless 110 square foot office in the Mennonite Central Committee Canada building.

A move this month will provide the two-person staff with more than 400 square feet of elbow room, a private meeting room and a healthy dose of natural light.

The new office is located at the Markham Professional Centre on the corner of Markham and Pembina, just south of our old location.

The move to a larger space reflects the growth in services offered by the Winnipeg office. The extension office exists to better connect Canadian volunteers with disaster response opportunities.

MDS hired our first staff person in

Canada in the spring of 2001 to support Binational and Region V activities. As we were starting up, we rented office space in the Winnipeg MCCC building. That location served us well until the fall of 2002 when we hired an administrative assistant.

That is when things became a little crowded. MCCC did not have space for two people and so MDS needed to look elsewhere.

With a post office, banking, print shop, parking and handicap access, the Markham Centre is an ideal location for MDS. The landlord has been generous with the rental rate for a three-year lease and constituents have been generous with labour and supplies to renovate the space.

MDS expects to be in our new office by June 1.



Photo credit: Nathan Koslowsky

The MDS extension office in Winnipeg has moved to the Markham Professional Centre on the corner of Markham and Pembina, just south of the old location at the MCCC building. The new address is 306-2265 Pembina Highway, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5J3.

### Get involved

#### connect locally with MDS

**Region I Meeting: Oct. 2003**

Bernard Martin, (540) 434-1916

**Region II Meeting: Feb. 2004**

Ottis Mast, (662) 738-5366

**Region III Meeting : Nov. 2003**

Paul Unruh, (316) 327-2755

**Region IV Meeting: Sept. 2003**

Wilmer Leichthy, (541) 928-8294

**Region V: Nov. 21-22 2003**

Gord Friesen, (204) 257-9048

### behindthehammer

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*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](http://www.mds.mennonite.net) for current photos and volunteer project information.



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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2: Disaster Viewpoint

3: More than Service

4-5: In My Backyard

6: Binational News

7: Region V Update

**New Yorkers learn carpentry skills while serving their community at Garifuna church**

(Standing left to right): Felix Solano, Bernard Martin, Celso Jaime, Maximo Alvarez and Hector Villanueva. (Kneeling): Santos Noé Rivas, Joe Steiner and Jose Alberto Henriquez. Together, this crew remodeled the food pantry at the Evangelical Garifuna Church. Complete story page 5.

