

## Disaster Management Program Update December, 2011



*As part of the Disaster Management Program at Hesston College, students spend eight weeks on a Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) project site during the summer. This past summer eight students spent their Summer Field Experience in Gulfport, MS for seven of the weeks and New Orleans, LA for one of the weeks. Three students from the Disaster Recovery Studies Program at Canadian Mennonite University were also part of the group. The students learned valuable lessons in the construction and repairing of homes, preparing and serving food to volunteers, working in an MDS office, working with other agencies in helping people recover, leading crews, communicating with homeowners, and interacting with other volunteers.*

*The students reflected on their experiences in their journals:*



*The students raise one of the walls of new home.*

**Jonathan Burkholder, Warden, Washington:** I think this week has gone by so fast because of the work that we did, framing the "J" house. I watched it go from nothing but posts sticking out of the ground to having the wall sheathing on the frame. Seeing that makes me feel good. Working with Bob was awesome; his knowledge combined with our work let us get so much done. Bob reminded me of my grandpa in the way he interacted with us, and just in his overall demeanor. I learned a lot about framing this week, even though it was a pretty fast course.



*Students and other long-term volunteers in Gulfport, Mississippi.*

**Logan Rierson, McPherson, Kansas:** On Saturday, we went to the Grand Bayou and met with the homeowner "R" and her family. "R" told us about how she packed up her clothes and couldn't take them all with her so she put all of her items in tubs and left them in the highest places she could so that if water got in the house, they would be dry. She explained how she evacuated by boat and was in Arkansas until she could come back and see the houses. She broke down in front of us and we embraced her and assured her it was okay to feel this way in telling her story. She appreciated all the work that MDS has done for her and her family.

**Jason Tennefoss, Greenwood, Delaware:** On Friday, we were mudding and taping the ceiling and walls. It will be really cool to watch the house come to completion and I am excited to be a part of the whole process and to learn the skills needed to do the tasks. The homeowners stopped by while we were there and I hope that we will have the opportunity to speak with them more in the future. It will be a work in progress as we learn to live together and with each other. I think that these are great skills to learn; more than just for an MDS site but also for life in general.

**Joey Stoltzfus, West Coxsackie, New York:** “R” has worked with the local housing resources center as the Gulfport area has rebuilt. He has some very interesting stories and insights into some of the organizations that have been working in the area. “R” and his wife moved here from Maryland after Katrina to help and serve with the rebuilding process. They have their house set up in a way that they can house small teams. I feel like I am getting a fast track education in disaster recovery in talking with him.



*Project director Clete Yoder leads in a home dedication.*

**Andrew Penner, Fresno, California:** At the beginning of our week, we were quickly finishing up the “B” house for the dedication. We did a lot of finish work and cleaning. I really enjoyed the finish work and spending most of my time putting in the floor and doing trim. Getting to see the end product put a warm feeling in my heart. Then on Tuesday, we had our first home dedication at the “B” house. This was exciting for everyone because we saw this house come from the mudding stage to being done. Also, seeing the faces of the family receiving the house made it even better.

**Sierra Wheeler, Bristol, Indiana:** This week the homeowners came to the “B” house to visit us. We talked to them for a while and they were very grateful

to us for the house. They had been out of their house for six years. The lady said that the house looked like a mansion to her. That amazed me because I had thought that the house was sort of smaller compared with some of the others. I guess if you have been living in an apartment or with family, it would change your opinion on size.

**Krista Rittenhouse, Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania:** Friday I got to be the crew leader at the “B” house. That was really neat and I was pleased that Clete thought I would do an alright job at that. It was fun for me to think about what order things needed to be done in order to make sure things could have time to dry and give it all two coats. I did enjoy the leadership position. I think the hardest part for me is that I don't like taking breaks. I want to maximize our time to work.



*Krista Rittenhouse paints window trim.*

**Josh Musser, Newport News, Virginia:** Gulfport became home for at least me, and for probably most of us. It was hard to say goodbye. We had to completely clean out the Grace House and the bunk house of MDS stuff because MDS is done in Gulfport. It's hard to think about how I will probably never see the Grace House again. It was also hard saying goodbye to Clete. We really bonded with him.

If you're interested in enrolling in our program, if I can answer any questions you may have, or if you'd like to visit our campus, please contact me. A Disaster Management Scholarship may be available to you, up to \$5,000 per year! We are also in need of funds for scholarships, and any gift would be greatly appreciated.

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