

VOLUNTEERS IN PLANO



Dear VIPs, VIP Supervisors and Community Volunteers:

“Helping people help one another” is the spirit of America. And it certainly was the spirit of Plano when Katrina evacuees came pouring into our city in early September.

Hurricane Katrina has had a profound impact on us, the City of Plano, all of Texas and the United States. So many of our citizens and City employees assisted in registering evacuees, coordinating shelter and housing, donating needed items, opening and manning a donation site, and helping evacuees feel comfortable and at home here in Plano. All in all, Plano assisted over 4,000 evacuees.

Here volunteers are the silver lining in the cloud of disaster. That truth is certainly evident everywhere in the United States right now as ordinary people drop everything to help. Volunteers by any definition – are doing an amazing range of work both in direct relief at the site of the disaster and in cities across the nation. The faith-based organizations and nonprofits have literally rallied thousands of volunteers doing every-

thing from welcoming newcomers and distributing personal items, cooking and serving meals, running youth programs, to providing medical and counseling care, and more. Private citizens are distributing emergency food, water, bedding and clothing; offering caring, friendly support; and counseling.

Dozens of cities large and small have taken in groups of displaced citizens, helping them to find housing and to receive medical care; and helping them to fit into an unknown community that they will be calling home for at least a while.

With the season of Thanksgiving and thankfulness here, what better way to show our appreciation than to feature some of the wonderful stories in our Volunteer Resources newsletter.

Respectfully,

Robin Popik

Robin Popik
Volunteer Resources Supervisor

Relief organization, which helps communities in disaster relief. With her help and expertise, the church was able to set up a Red Cross compliant shelter where 100 volunteers were recruited within 24 hours of hearing a bus of evacuees was headed their way. Linda also attended a meeting organized by the City in order to see how their shelter could best serve the incoming evacuees.

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*Photo from “Scarecrows”
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November 2005
City of Plano
VIP Program

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An Army Of Compassion

by Angela McCaskill

The call to volunteer in the Katrina relief effort was a natural one for Linda Jenkins. “I’m a nurse, a caregiver. You’re called to help and you go.” Linda worked on the frontline at the shelter set up at Christ United Methodist Church in Plano. She is a member of the United Methodist Care and

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The shelter not only provided housing, food, clothing, counseling and childcare, but also Internet use to help evacuees search for missing loved ones. Because of her experience as a nurse, Linda was particularly concerned with the overwhelming medical needs of their new guests. She commented that some people were taking the wrong medications for their conditions; others did not know the names of their medications; and others arrived with considerable wounds from the evacuation. The church was able to set up a clinic where doctors donated their time and talents.

“The moms arrived despondent,” shared Linda. After such a long bus ride, moms with toddlers entered tired and somber. The relief workers found that due to the “innocence of youth,” the toddlers were a great source of joy at the shelter. One family in particular, the Brown’s, stood out in Linda’s mind. Separated during the evacuation then dispersed between the Convention Center, Arlington and the church shelter, a team of volunteers was able to reunite the family in the United Methodist shelter. This included their blind and crippled grandma Dot. It was an emotional and rewarding reunion.

“There were no rule books for how to act. Plans were invented as we went along,” commented Linda. She and fellow volunteers plan to follow up on their former residents who now are in apartments to ensure their needs continue to be met and to lend a helping hand where they can. Through three active shelters, Plano had 1,260 volunteers donate 14,254 hours to shelter, feed, transport and even counsel the evacuees.



IHOP: Not Just for Pancakes Anymore

by Angela McCaskill

Debbie Ross would have never thought she would be a key player in the Katrina relief effort the morning she took her kids to eat at the International

House of Pancakes (IHOP). It was an average day before Katrina had hit. As Debbie and family cheerfully waited for their table, they were approached by a family who was also waiting for a table. It turned out they were an evacuee family from New Orleans, who anxiously asked her questions about Plano’s available resources. Debbie was so touched she knew she had to do something. She and her children decided to organize a bake sale at Huffman Elementary School with proceeds going to the Red Cross. The effort raised \$1,600 in only one and a half hours!

Later Debbie and her family saw a bus full of evacuees, and they were surprised and saddened by the number of children’s faces pressed against the window panes. So Debbie began to visit the hotels in the area to assess their needs. She stated “There was no way to grasp the enormity of the problem.” Before she knew it, she was receiving hundreds of calls from local hotels for assistance.

Word spread of this courageous hotel hopper and an important relationship was formed between her and the City. Debbie and another 20-plus canvassing volunteers were asked to collect basic information: number of evacuees in each hotel; future housing needs; and medical, transportation, food and clothing needs. They also gave them information about the City’s Katrina Support Center.

Perhaps even more important, Debbie was there to offer emotional support and care; the one thing she said they greatly need on a daily basis. Debbie has a special empathy for the evacuees, as she faced a similar incident five years prior when her house burned down.

“I was amazed at the enormous response from the City and faith-based community,” she remarked. She further expressed that the Plano emergency response system was astoundingly quick and effective.

When asked why she did it, Debbie said she saw the need and when there is a need we should do something about it. What a great opportunity she had to model to her children the spirit of volunteerism and what a difference one family can make in the lives of hundreds of families.



People are good and generous

by Angela McCaskill

“There are two things I learned from this experience,” said Susan Barnett, one of the Katrina Donation Site Coordinators. “First, people are good and generous. And secondly, that we have way too much stuff!” Susan of Willow Bend Church and David Ummel of First Baptist Church contacted the City of Plano immediately after Katrina hit, both willing to set up a donation site. They were excited when Robin Popik, Volunteer Resources Supervisor, suggested they work together in this effort. “I was excited about the opportunity to serve the evacuees. I asked God where I could be used,” said Susan. “The response became a team effort between the two churches.”

Susan worked hand-in-hand with David to set up and manage

the site. Susan primarily received, registered and managed the Donation Site volunteers. While David was responsible for managing and supervising the receipt of donations.

They entered an empty gym on Labor Day morning and in five hours it was full of donations. "It looked like a Walmart," she exclaimed. They opened their doors to the evacuees the next morning. The people were overwhelmed with the amount of donations from which to choose. Susan said the evacuees were consistently thankful and overjoyed by the kindness of the City of Plano and its residents. "People have been awesome," commented one site visitor.

The biggest challenge facing the Donation Site was getting the word out to the evacuees. People were spread out everywhere - hotels, houses, shelters - so the notification was posted everywhere. "Items have come from as far as Ohio," said David. "Our gym is full, plus we have a 400-square-foot

warehouse and 400-square-foot of classroom overloaded with goods." For a period of seven weeks, 450 volunteers donated 2,400 hours to help more than 700 Katrina and Rita families (approximately 3,000 individuals). On Saturday, October 22, the Katrina Relief Center was opened to Plano residents in need; and 2,000 individuals from the community came for the Free Garage Sale.

One still struggling, Katrina evacuee said, "This is amazing, they transformed the church into a shelter and gave us so much. They even helped us locate relatives that were missing through the Internet and phone calls."

Another said, "It has been an emotional roller coaster, but once we got to Plano, we were given shelter, clothing, food and medical assistance, and the children play without worry."

Volunteer Internship Points to New Career

When City of Plano Environmental Health Intern Chrystalyn Harrison (left) first learned of an opening in the Department on the City's Web site during an Internship Preparation class, she knew it was the job for her. She'd be another step closer to entering the health field, ending up in the medical community helping others.



When she began her internship with Environmental Health this summer, she was met not with a medical thermometer and a batch of patients in a waiting room but rather with a meat thermometer and a batch of restaurants waiting for food quality inspections. "I was not aware the Health Department was not on the medical side of health and only did inspections," said Chrystalyn smiling over a stack of plan reviews. "Before I started interning, I didn't even know where Health Inspectors could be found."

After eight weeks of assisting field inspectors in ensuring restaurants meet stringent food safety requirements for the protection of public health, Chrystalyn has set her sights on a newly modified "health career." "The love of helping people drew me into the health field. I love helping people and making them happy," she said. "I have always known I would end up in a hospital or the community helping others.

But now I'm strongly considering taking the state exam to become a Registered Sanitarian and practice the skill of being a Health Inspector. I have already applied for positions in two cities and am awaiting a response."

Tomeji Miller, Inspection Services Supervisor explained "We usually offer volunteer internships twice a year and it's a win-win situation for

everyone." We were delighted to get connected to Chrystalyn at the beginning of the summer. She assisted with FDA performance standards, both food and swimming pool field inspections, and provided valued input on our projects and programs."

Chrystalyn echoes those sentiments, "This experience has been very beneficial. My favorite part of this position has been going out into the field and assisting the Inspectors with their routine inspections. I am learning about what to do in order to become a Registered Sanitarian and about which restaurants are at higher risk than others. The staff here are very helpful and have taken me in like one of their own."

Chrystalyn, an undergraduate from Texas Women's University, contributed over 360 hours of time over the course of this summer.

Scarecrows, Butterflies, Bugs and Worms – OH MY!!



Squeals of delight at the scarecrows, butterflies, bugs and composting worms, “oohs” and “ahs” at the fragrance and color throughout the gardens, and many, many questions filled the air this fall as 500 guests wandered among the garden beds and backyard bins at the City of Plano Environmental Discovery Center (EDC). “Staffed with 85 teen volunteers from Jasper, John Paul II, Plano Senior High and Plano East Senior High, along with 21 adult volunteers from Plano Master Composters, Dallas Master Naturalists, and Collin County Master Gardeners we were ready to go,” said Deb Bliss, Compost Education Coordinator. Through their combined 320 hours of service, these volunteers gave one-on-one attention and instruction to the participating children.”

Sponsored by the City’s Environmental Waste Services education and community outreach department, children listened to nature stories, found creek critters through microscope lenses, assembled compost tea bags, prepared a safe anti-fungal spray for plants, designed seed buddies that would grow grass hair and created dirt sundaes of pudding, crushed cookies and gummy worms.

Near the butterfly garden, the Master Gardeners showed how to make flying butterfly necklaces, and at the raised bed children’s garden they

supervised pea planting in the ground and in take-home pots. Master Naturalists facilitated safe insect collection and identification in the tall grasses along the creek bank. No casualties were reported though there were 20 hopping kids with swooping nets! Volunteer Master Composters, Sherrian Jones and Erin Hoffer, involved families in turning active compost piles, sifting finished compost and making face-to-face introductions with red wigglers as they explained the vermi-composting system.

Uniformed Junior ROTC students talked with children as they designed greeting cards for our soldiers overseas.

Our high school volunteers assisted children in Gyotaku, the Japanese art of making fish prints using rubber models of native Texas fish. They encouraged the children as they worked on recycled art crafts and sculpted with discarded colorful telephone wire. Rave reviews and many more Plano residents familiar with the xeriscape demonstration gardens were the results of our efforts. “The environmental education and community outreach staff of eight had their effect multiplied many times because of these enthusiastic volunteers, and what more can you ask for than that?” Deb exclaimed with a huge grin on her face.



New Equipment Takes Park Inventory Project Hi-Tech

by Robin Popik

Scout groups and adults can now use GPS (Global Positioning System) units to inventory park items (such as trails, pavilions, playground equipment, grills, picnic tables, benches, restrooms and much more). “Using a GPS handheld or backpack unit, volunteers have an opportunity to choose from a list of parks that have not been inventoried,” explained Tina Bashor, Park Planning Technician. Tina provides volunteers with training, a



park system map and a more detailed map of each park they choose. “Volunteers are especially useful and appreciated on a project of this size.”

Volunteers walk the parks and input all features listed in the data dictionary. Casey Carringer (14) and Kevin (Casey’s younger brother)

were in only one of the scout groups that took on this project. With a GPS backpack, they rented for \$50 and instructions from Tina, the boys inventoried eight parks in one day. Another group took digital pictures of items that needed repair and of the entire park for future reference, along with a picture of themselves while doing the inventory.

“We recently changed from paper inventories to GIS (Geographical Information System) inventories,” explained Tina. “So the project is much easier and faster to do.”

This October City employees Cliff Bormann (Building Inspection), Kenneth Bentley (Parks) and Jennifer Gidel (Storm Water Specialist) helped out for Make A Difference Day by surveying eight locations covering almost 100 acres. Jennifer took her whole family along to help. She said, “We visited four area parks and recorded the entire inventory in the park. Our favorite part was using the polygon feature to walk around the playgrounds and sports courts. My husband Jeff and son Sam were excited to help with the project and found the GPS unit easy to operate. We were pleased with the experience and hope to participate again in the future. What better way to spend your Saturday?”



City Employees “Making A Difference”

by Deborah Stone



Saturday, October 22, City of Plano employees worked throughout the community to “make a difference,” participating in a number of observances on national “Make a Difference Day.”

Several municipal employees from various departments worked on Habitat for Humanity projects in Plano. Assisting the Medical Center of Plano in construction of a new house for a hard-working family, the employee teams painted baseboards, created punch lists and helped to finish out the home, which will welcome its new occupants in time for the upcoming holiday season.

Through Keep Plano Beautiful (KPB), Plano Senior High School Students, the Home Depot and many community-minded citizens will team with Native Texas Garden Design owners David and Christy Ilfrey to spruce up the front yards of 10 senior citizen properties! The teams, including City staff, will mow, edge, weed-eat, clean flowerbeds and add new plantings to the seniors’ homes. “It is our hope that the homeowners will enjoy a vibrant and healthy rejuvenated landscape and that our volunteers will reap the rewards of helping those who are unable to maintain their yards as they would like,” said Casey Eckert-Luker, KPB Education Coordinator.

Through the Library, the Teen Advisory Board is promoting restocking our local food banks through October by accepting non-perishable food donations at all Library locations, City Hall, Fire Stations and Municipal Center South (Parks). This project is ongoing throughout October.

“Giving back to our All-America City is a gift the employee team gives year-round. Student mentoring, dress for success clothing drives geared to persons needing business wardrobes for interviews and new jobs, school supply support, holiday adoptions of families and individuals, Salvation Army Bell Ringing, United Way support and many specialized projects throughout the year are but a few of the projects undertaken by the City team,” explained Deborah Stone, Public Information Coordinator.

Pass the word.
For year-round volunteer opportunities,
check out www.planotx.org/vip/

Plano TV Network - Video Producer and Production Staff. The volunteer would need working knowledge of video camera operation, non-linear editing, operating a character generator and robotic camera. Direction experience is helpful. (Monday p.m. hours)

Environmental Waste Services - Puppeteers needed for Composting and Recycling Education, and Recycling Program Presenter. (School hours)

Literacy for Life - If you enjoy working with people, you may want to teach an adult to read, one-on-one tutoring for those with ESL. For training information, contact Rebecca Hawthorne at (972) 941-READ. Volunteers will meet students at neighborhood libraries. (times are flexible)

Library Links with Seniors - Lead book discussions, facilitate story telling or introduce books to seniors in assisted living homes and daycare centers and watch them smile.

Office Assistance - Help with filing, data entry, envelope stuffing, phone support, monthly meetings, greeting the public, tour guide and computer skills. Good communication is important and bi-lingual skills are helpful in some departments.

Oak Point Amphitheater - Outdoor lovers and art lovers come together in a customer service role to help audiences enjoy shows at the new Oak Point Amphitheater. Volunteers can be ticket takers, hosts and hostesses, office clerks, and tour guides.

Super Sorters - Do you collect books? We do! Bring a friend or enjoy the quiet time while you help sort, label and box donated books for the annual book sale. Training provided. (times are flexible)

For more information, contact Robin at robinp@plano.gov or call (972) 941-7114.

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Please call the Volunteer Resources office, (972) 941-7436,
with changes to your name, address and phone number.



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