

# **Student mission volunteers spring into action**

April 4, 2006

Posted: 3/31/06

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A Texas State University student removes plaster from a New Orleans home. Texas State Baptist Student Ministries brought a team that cleaned this home in less than a day. (Photos by John Hall)

## **Student mission volunteers spring into action**

**By John Hall**

*Texas Baptist Communications*

NEW ORLEANS—Thomas Lloyd hopes to move his family back into their home by Thanksgiving—more than a year after Hurricane Katrina forced them to move out. This spring break, he praised God for extra hands that moved him toward that goal.

Lloyd is one of many Louisiana homeowners helped by more than 200 Texas Baptist students from 11 college campuses. Student volunteers stripped storm-damaged homes down to their studs March 13-17.

The Texans were among more than 1,000 college students who served in New Orleans under direction of the Southern Baptist Convention North American Mission Board and New Orleans Baptist churches this spring break.



Rebecca Zuniga, a University of Mary-Hardin Baylor student, pulls a nail from a stud in a New Orleans house.

Those teams will be followed by other groups who want to work in the city. Some groups will clean out homes, while other Baptists will begin the rebuilding process on homes already cleared.

In most cases, a team of college students removed all the furniture,

appliances, flooring, sheet rock and plaster from a house within a day and moved on to the next home. The swift progress was a pleasant change for Lloyd, who was doing the same work by himself.

"It means the world to me that they're caring and sharing," Lloyd said of the team of University of Houston and Rice University students who worked on his house. "They're caring for people who were devastated by this natural disaster."

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The trip provided an opportunity for college students to help a situation that touched their hearts. Many had opportunities to go other places but felt they needed to come to New Orleans. They know they cannot rebuild the city alone, but they wanted to do what they could, they said.

"I just really wanted the opportunity to come down here and show our support for the people of New Orleans, just do what we can as far as physical labor goes and be here to talk to them and show them we love them," Caitlin Thomas of Rice said.

The work was bittersweet for the students as they removed a family's belongings in hopes of helping them put their lives back together.

"In that pile, there are people's clothes and there are mildewed dolls, children's toys," said Jason Harrell, Baptist Student Ministries director at Rice. "There's a little girl's room in the back. That's in the pile. Their entire life is almost represented in this pile.

"Yeah, I see a lot of destruction, and it's bad, but we're optimistic because we know we're tearing out, making way for new things to happen inside the home here. They're going to rebuild."



A Texas A&M University at Commerce student pulls a load of lawn supplies from the backyard of a New Orleans home.

As they worked on the construction projects, many students met the homeowners and talked with them about the hurricane experiences. Many people are living on streets surrounded by empty homes. Others live in trailers.

The students provided someone to listen to each person's story, offering encouragement and prayer.

"I didn't realize the people are still hurting like they are," said Lacy Sanders, a student at Texas A&M University at Commerce. "I think it really brought to realization how much they are really hurting and how much healing it's really going to take."

In those moments of encouragement, prayer and cleaning, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor student Bonnie Flentge saw hope for the devastated

city. She remembered coming to New Orleans with her church before the storm and again in January. Seeing the ravaged homes still breaks her heart, but she also noticed flashes of reconstruction one house at a time.

God is at work in the rubble, she believes. And he has allowed her to be part of it.

"I'm really excited to see how God uses all this devastation for his glory," she said.

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