

HURRICANE RESPONSE EFFORTS



GINGER PERRY/The Winchester Star

Shenandoah University students Kaitlyn Shand (left) and Jo Ann Batteiger pack 5-gallon buckets with cleaning supplies Thursday in front of SU's Goodson Chapel. The campus' office of Spiritual Life bought the supplies, students packed the buckets and they will be delivered to Braddock Street United Methodist Church to be taken to Texas, where local United Methodist Committee on Relief Early Response Teams have been assisting in the Hurricane Harvey relief effort.

Volunteers share stories, ask people to remember survivors

By CATHY KUEHNER
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — Individuals who have traveled to areas hard hit over the past month by three deadly hurricanes — Harvey, Irma and Maria — say financial and physical help will be needed for years to come.

They hope as time goes by no one forgets the residents of southeast Texas, southern Louisiana, South Florida and islands throughout the Caribbean Sea, including U.S. territory Puerto Rico. It's difficult to identify everyone from the Winchester area who went to lend aid after the storms or who is still on the ground helping. Each will have unique stories to share, but their overall impressions are likely similar.

■ The Virginia Emergency Management Department offers tips on how best to volunteer after disasters | A10

"Wherever we went, we met people who are just overwhelmed. Having people come in — people who are trained in disaster relief — that gave them hope," said the Rev. Joanna Dietz, minister of mission and service at Braddock Street United Methodist Church in Winchester, who joined a five-person team from Virginia that spent a week in Victoria, Texas.

"As we drove into Texas, there were clear lines of delineation.

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Local National Guardsmen leaving to help Virgin Islands

By ONOFRIO CASTIGLIA
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — Gov. Terry McAuliffe has authorized the Virginia National Guard to send 120 soldiers to the U.S. Virgin Islands to help those affected by recent hurricanes.

Twenty to 30 of those soldiers are from the Winchester area, according to National Guard recruiter Robert Hucks, who is based here. They will be deployed "anywhere from 30 to 60 days."

"Right now, it's just aid," Hucks said.

The 120 soldiers are assigned to the Staunton-based 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

"Up to 400 additional soldiers are scheduled to follow soon after to conduct humanitarian assistance, clear roads and distribute essential supplies," a news release from the governor's office states.

The first soldiers from the 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team departed Sunday, according to a news release from the Virginia National Guard. They will be part of a multistate, multiagency response effort to the recent hurricanes.

Virginia has coordinated 10 missions to aid affected regions.



Virginia is ready to help communities facing the long road to recovery from the devastation wrought on their cities and towns by the recent hurricanes.

— Terry McAuliffe
Virginia governor,
in a news release

The largest single mission will be to the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"Virginia is ready to help communities facing the long road to recovery from the devastation wrought on their cities and towns by the recent hurricanes," McAuliffe stated. "Commonwealth officials, the Virginia National Guard, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, and other agencies remain in close contact with our counterparts in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Puerto Rico

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Volunteers

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Some areas were untouched and beautiful. Then there were miles of homes covered in debris with all the contents of the homes piled in yards," she said.

Dietz is trained and certified to be among the first wave of volunteers through United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and its Early Response Team training. After receiving ERT training, it is the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) that coordinates volunteers from across the country, sending them where they are needed.

"When we're out there, it's not just about feeding people. They want to talk. They need to share their stories as part of the recovery process," said American Red Cross disaster relief volunteer Pam Pampe, who arrived in Beaumont, Texas, on Sept. 18 and will return to her Winchester home Oct. 2.

"It's bad here, and I've seen it before in my own front yard," said Pampe, who lived in South Florida when Hurricane Andrew hit in 1992. It's because of the Red Cross response to Andrew that Pampe joined the organization when she moved to Winchester in 2004.

Like Dietz, Pampe is a trained disaster relief volunteer, having received her certification from the Red Cross. And, like United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, the Red Cross maintains a database of trained volunteers it can call on to deploy where they're needed.

"The hardest-hit areas around Port Arthur got power back on Sept. 20, almost a month after the hurricane," Pampe said during a recent phone interview.

"I'm in an area where there were many fatalities, which creates more trauma for the survivors. They are in shock."

Pampe, who is living in a motorcycle dealership building with 300 other volunteers, spends much of her time in Beaumont delivering food.

After volunteers prepare and serve food each morning at a church, Red Cross vehicles are loaded with meals and snacks.

"We are feeding families that are living in what's left of their homes, homeless families in shelters and people who are living in the woods," she said.

"I think the Red Cross will probably be here feeding 10,000 people for two to three months," Pampe said, referring to the Beaumont area. Pampe could not estimate the vastness of the Red Cross meal program in all hurricane-affected areas.

Vanessa Santiago is a program specialist with Project HOPE's Global Volunteer Programs. She was part of a HOPE team deployed to clinics in Houston, Katy, Tomball and Rosenberg, Texas. Santiago spent three weeks in Texas, returning to her Winchester home late last week.

"Some roads were still flooded, and you could see watermarks on houses 6 feet high. People literally lost everything," she said.

"I speak Spanish, so I did a lot of interpreting in the clinics," she said. "I broke down and cried a few times."

Santiago said many residents of the hardest-hit areas in Texas don't have health insurance, don't speak English and fear that asking for help may result in immigration issues.

"We made sure people felt safe. Working out of churches helped," she said.

"We saw a lot of health issues — allergies and asthma — related to mold and contami-

State offers tips on volunteering

The Virginia Department of Emergency Management wants individuals to know how best to help communities devastated by hurricanes without risking their own economic or personal safety and without putting additional burden on those areas receiving unsolicited aid.

The most effective way to support communities impacted by hurricanes is to donate money and time to trusted, reputable nonprofit charitable organizations, according to the department. Additionally:

- Cash donations offer nonprofit agencies flexibility to address urgent needs, and allow them to obtain needed resources nearer to the disaster location. This also provides an eco-

nommic boost to local businesses.

- Do not donate unsolicited goods such as used clothing, household items, medicine or perishable food. When used personal items arrive, the helping agencies must redirect staff away from providing direct services to survivors in order to sort, package, transport, warehouse and distribute items that may not meet the needs of disaster survivors.
- Donate money through trusted organizations. Many volunteer-, faith- and community-based organizations are active in disasters and are trusted conduits for financial donations.
- Volunteers should not

self-deploy. Unexpected volunteers showing up in impacted areas will create additional burdens for first responders.

- Potential volunteers are asked to register with a voluntary or charitable organization of their choice, many of which are already deployed and supporting survivors on the ground.
- Volunteers should only go into affected areas with a specific volunteer assignment, proper safety gear and valid identification to ensure volunteer safety, as well as the safety of disaster survivors.
- Visit the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster at nvoad.org/howtohelp to learn how to help.

nated floodwaters," Santiago said, adding that the disaster also contributed to high blood pressure, high anxiety and stress.

Mental health professionals are as in demand as doctors and nurses, she said.

Santiago said she was struck by the fact that many of the health care professionals and first responders who are helping live in the same neighborhoods.

"Their homes were damaged or destroyed, too."

Dietz and her team members arrived in Victoria with 33 "flood buckets" — 5-gallon buckets with resealable lids filled with specific cleaning supplies. Other volunteers at the church serving as the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission facility in Victoria had just distributed the last of their flood buckets.

"So, before preparing for work, we immediately handed out our buckets," Dietz said.

Many of the flood buckets Dietz and her team took to Victoria were prepared by Shenandoah University students, who raised funds, purchased the specific supplies and packed the buckets.

"Students always want to do something immediately after a disaster. We are educating them to wait. Be patient. Let people [in the disaster area] tell us what they need," said Shenandoah's Assistant Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Spiritual Life Justin Allen. "Don't rush in and do something just to make yourself feel good."

The university, which is affiliated with the United Methodist Church, has long partnered with United Methodist Committee on Relief, supporting its humanitarian relief efforts around the world. Allen reminds students of the church's guiding principles: Do no harm. Do good.

"We know cleaning buckets are needed now, and we can go to the Dollar Store, Lowe's and Walmart and prepare buckets for about \$65 each," Allen said.

The City Sheriff's Office Foundation and the City Fire and Rescue Foundation were

among the local organizations that heard the call for cleaning supplies and responded.

Over one weekend in mid-September, Winchester-based Shine Transportation parked a tractor-trailer outside the Costco Wholesale warehouse on Front Royal Pike (U.S. 522). Customers were handed lists of specific cleaning supplies and items such as flashlights, batteries and water.

"It was amazing," said Winchester Sheriff Les Taylor. "I didn't think we'd fill the truck in a weekend, but we live in such a good, caring community. We filled the truck with 26 pallets of supplies and water."

Taylor said organizing the collection was a huge undertaking, but once Shine Transportation came through with a truck, the biggest challenge was met.

"Costco let us hand out flyers, and people gave generously," Taylor said. "Some people gave us cash — one man handed us \$500 — so we were able to buy another \$500 worth of supplies and give Shine Transportation \$500 toward fuel for the trip to Texas."

Recovery in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands will take years. Volunteers from the Winchester area and across the country will be helping families and communities clean and rebuild long after the 2017 Atlantic hurricane season officially ends Nov. 30.

Dietz, Pampe and Santiago encourage anyone who can physically help, or serve as translators, to work with organizations to receive proper certification.

Because working in disaster areas is physically demanding and emotionally draining, most agencies sent relief workers for two or three weeks, and then required them to go home to recover.

Everyone who has experience in disaster relief says the best way to help is to send money to reputable agencies.

"I strongly recommend [United Methodist Committee on Relief] and the American



GINGER PERRY/The Winchester Star

Shenandoah University sophomore Alaina Anderson (left) and SU office of Spiritual Life intern Joy Chappell unwrap cleaning items Thursday in front of the school's Goodson Chapel. The items will be packed in 5-gallon buckets to be used by local United Methodist Committee on Relief Early Response Teams that have been assisting in Victoria, Texas, after Hurricane Harvey.

Red Cross, because every penny goes where it is needed," said Dietz, noting volunteers pay their own expenses, sleep in donated facilities — usually churches — and do all they can not to take resources away from residents.

Pampe said financial contributions can be turned into debit cards for hurricane survivors.

"Individuals can take those cards, buy exactly what they need, and the money supports local businesses, which desperately need to recover, too."

Santiago said, "Organizations like Project HOPE are successful because we don't show up and tell people what we're going to do. We show up and ask, 'What is your need?'"

Dietz said everything residents need — from diapers to tarps for covering roofs to mold removal products — are available locally.

"Sending stuff may make you feel good, but it diverts the energy and focus of people who are working in disaster areas," Allen said.

Another reason to wait, Allen said, is help will be needed long after the disaster is no longer front-page news. In December, he is taking a group of students on a mission trip to Virginia Beach to help with ongoing rebuilding efforts there — more than a year after Hurricane Matthew.

Dietz said it was hard to return to Winchester when there is so much that needs to be done to help hurricane survivors recover and rebuild.

"This disaster is far from over. We moved so quickly from Harvey to Irma to Maria," said Dietz. "But there is hope when we can continue to work at it piece by piece, day by day."

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