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Kentucky shows its caring Volunteers help parish relief efforts

By Cecily Holland

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Former Opelousas resident Carola Hartley, along with 10 others from Nicholasville, Ky., decided to take a week off work and lend a helping hand to the people of St. Landry Parish who are helping with Hurricane Katrina relief efforts.

Along with the manpower of much-needed volunteers came six trucks full of supplies for the St. Landry Parish Relief Center.

Blake Garrison, a college student at Western Kentucky University, is missing a week of school to help.

"My dad was coming down, so I decided to come, too," he said. "I talked to my professors before I left and they were OK with me coming."

For Hartley, the former director of the Main Street program in Opelousas, the mission of mercy was simply never a question.

"Louisiana is my home state, and this is my hometown," Hartley said. "I have family here, so I just had to do something."

While Hartley may have gotten the ball rolling, it was the people in and around Nicholasville who really made the relief effort happen.

"This is definitely a good grassroots effort," said volunteer Rob Garrison. "I felt compelled to help and there was definitely a need."

Hartley got started on the project with help from a good friend who is the executive director for Louisiana Coastal Activities.

"I asked her what I could do and then I contacted (St. Landry Parish President) Don Menard, and he stated that they were in desperate need of help," she said.

Hartley immediately opened up a bank account for what she calls the Kentucky Katrina relief.

From that account, she has collected funds to help the relief fund in St. Landry Parish. On Tuesday, she and another volunteer made a shopping trip in Opelousas with the \$7,000

raised to buy even more supplies for those displaced by the storm.

Hartley's husband, Tim, also made the journey and said the help they received from people in Kentucky was tremendous when they told them what they planned to do.

"A lot of our friends donated cash and material items," Tim Hartley said. "The people who are here from Kentucky took off from their jobs and wanted to do this."

Carola Hartley said they also donated a truck of supplies to Livingston Parish and Moss Point, Miss.

"Now, I have people from other places calling for help, and we're going to try to help them," she said.

The Kentucky help came from points across the state.

Mary Queen of the Rosary, a Catholic school in Lexington, Ky., heard about Hartley and her efforts and donated 450 new school desks to the St. Landry Parish school system, which has taken in approximately 1,100 displaced students.

Hartley, however, didn't have the means to get the desks here, so she contacted Lee Thistlethwaite to see if he could put her in contact with someone who could help.

Thistlethwaite got Wal-Mart to send a truck, and the desks were delivered to Opelousas this week.

"I think the people are really pitching in because they know that it's going to (help) real people," Hartley said.

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