

Community Report from Livingston County CARES

April 18, 2007

A Brief History of Livingston CARES

Livingston County CARES, Inc. is a collaborative effort among groups and organizations at SUNY Geneseo and in the Geneseo and Livingston County community that started in September 2005 to focus relief and recovery efforts on helping people in Harrison County, Mississippi. The initial group of organizations that endorsed and are working on this project include SUNY Geneseo students, faculty, and staff, the Livingston County Administrator, the Livingston County Chamber of Commerce, the Town of Geneseo, the Village of Geneseo, and the Livingston County Coalition of Churches. Individuals, organizations, schools, local municipalities, and interested citizens are invited to participate in Livingston County CARES projects and programs.

Livingston County CARES, Inc. was incorporated and registered as a New York State non-profit organization in 2006. In March 2007 the IRS granted CARES tax exempt status under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code. Gifts and donations to CARES are now tax deductible. Donations may be given as restricted gifts for specific projects or to the general fund. Livingston CARES board members are volunteers and there are no employees and very minimal administrative overhead. The headquarters for Livingston CARES is in the Center for Community at SUNY Geneseo; the Center for Community in the Division of Student & Campus Life supports CARES through its commitment to volunteer work, leadership development, civic engagement of students, and outreach to community organizations. Organizations and individuals interested in volunteering or making contributions should contact Tom Matthews at 585-245-5857 or by email at matthews@geneseo.edu or Kay Fly at 585-245-5898 or email fly@geneseo.edu

Six Projects Approved for Harrison County, Mississippi

Livingston CARES has concentrated on recruiting volunteers to sign up for trips to Mississippi to work on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of homes for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Twenty months after the hurricane we have sent 187 volunteers on six work trips to work on houses; a seventh is scheduled for May 2007. Another round of trips will occur in the winter and spring of 2008.

The total value of the volunteer efforts using the National Corporation for Public Service guidelines of \$16.50 per hour and 50 hours of work by each volunteer on the trips is estimated to be \$154,275 of volunteer contributions to our work in Harrison County, Mississippi. In addition to the time, the volunteers have paid their own expenses or obtained donations for the trips at an average cost of \$550.00 per person. The work trip fees paid by the volunteers currently totals \$103,953.24. Livingston CARES has also received gifts and donations to assist volunteers with travel expenses and for projects in Harrison County. Since the Hurricane in 2005 Livingston CARES has received \$18,617.61 in gifts and donations from individuals and organizations. In 2006 the Division of Student & Campus Life also contributed \$12,250 to help pay for transportation and to assist students with expenses on the January and March trips. Donations directly to HOPE Unites to assist volunteers with expenses are not reflected in these figures. Livingston CARES funds have been used to assist student volunteers with travel assistance. The balance of the funds have been held pending the identification of appropriate projects by officials

in Harrison County. Although projects have moved slowly, CARES identified six projects. These projects are described below. Additional projects will continue to be evaluated and supported as funds become available.

Livingston County Coalition of Churches Tools for Katrina Project

The Tools for Katrina Project was organized by the Livingston County Coalition of Churches as a Livingston CARES project. Doug Wilson, pastor at the Geneseo United Methodist Church and member Charlie Becker served as the coordinators of the project. The project was organized in the spring of 2006 by local churches and tools were collected at The Geneseo United Methodist Church, Geneseo Central Presbyterian Church, Livonia Church of Christ and the Avon Methodist Church. Smith Lumber in Lakeville and some contractors also contributed money and tools. **Dave and Erin Bills** from the Livonia Community Church delivered the tools in July to two recovery centers in Biloxi--Hands ON Gulf Coast and Volunteers on Gulf Coast. Church related items were delivered to the Biloxi Methodist Church.

In addition to the tools collected and delivered in July, the Tools for Katrina project collected \$893.84 from Geneseo United Methodist Church, \$153.00 from Central Presbyterian Church, a \$24.75 cash donation, and \$75.00 from a donation to the Chamber of Commerce for a total of \$1146.59. Expenses included \$83.78 to Avon Lumber for purchase of tools, \$105.89 to Harbor Freight for purchase of tools, \$172.83 to Avon Penny Saver for an ad in the Penny Saver, and \$400.00 gas for the trip to Biloxi. The remaining cash of \$384.00 was donated to the Hands ON Gulf Coast recovery center in Biloxi to be used for recovery work. The project delivered 630 items to the recovery centers as well as 4 boxes of sheet music, 300 hymnals, and choir robes to the Biloxi Methodist Church.

Woolmarket Youth Football League

Harrison County Board of Supervisors President, Connie Rockco, identified the Woolmarket Youth Football League as an organization that needed assistance. Steering committee member Kurt Christiansen made contacts with the equipment manager for the program and learned that all of their newly purchased equipment in the summer of 2005 had been destroyed in the hurricane. The steering committee approved a donation of \$660 to purchase outfits for five students in the program. A check was sent from Livingston CARES in September and Susan Martel, president of the league sent a thank you letter at the end of the season with a photo CD album of the youth served by the program.

Harrison County Greenhouse Restoration Project

After several phone inquiries about possible projects that Livingston CARES might undertake, one of the suggestions that surfaced was the need to restore vegetation along the Gulf Coast. The Harrison County Beautification Director, Cindi Simmons, identified a greenhouse area damaged by Katrina that could be restored and used to propagate plants and trees for replanting public parks and grounds in the county. Members of the steering committee agreed that this project could involve garden clubs and other organizations in the county. Kathleen Jones volunteered to begin reaching out to the garden clubs, the biology department at the college, and others interested in gardening to enlist support for the greenhouse project. During the January 2007 work-trip, Jones, Lehman, and Matthews met Simmons at the greenhouse area and recommended

that CARES proceed with the project. In March all 49 volunteers on the spring break trip spent their first day in Gulfport clearing the debris from the greenhouse area. Kathleen Jones continues to make presentations to garden clubs and the first gift designated for the project has been given by the Geneseo Garden Club. Individuals and organizations interested in this project should contact Kathleen Jones.

ARC Connections to the Gulf Coast

Steering committee member Lyle Lehman has been working for the past year to make connections between the Livingston-Wyoming ARC and the ARC in Harrison County. Lehman met with board members of The ARC of the Gulf Coast on both trips to Mississippi and was instrumental in securing a \$4,000.00 donation from the local ARC Foundation to Livingston CARES to forward to The ARC of the Gulf Coast to assist the Harrison County ARC programs and projects. The transfer of the gift was approved in March and the funds have been forwarded to The ARC of the Gulf Coast. Additional monies have been collected by ARC residents to be sent to the Gulf Coast residents of ARC.

Woolmarket Youth Recreation Complex Project

Supervisor Connie Rockco requested our assistance with restoration of the youth recreation complex in her district north of Biloxi. Lehman, Jones, and Matthews met with the staff of the complex on the January 2007 work-trip and reviewed possible project assistance. Several options were considered and the one that the steering committee felt made the most sense, given our limited funds, was to pay for the replacement of a flag pole at the complex. The committee approved a donation of \$2,000.00 for the purchase and installation of the pole. A plaque on the pole will recognize the gift from the people of Livingston County, New York. A check will be presented to Supervisor Rockco at the Share and Care Dinner on April 18.

Moore Community House

Prior to Katrina, Moore Community House in East Biloxi was the only center serving low income families with day care and other pre-school programs such as Head Start. Katrina destroyed all but one of the buildings in the complex. During the last year members of CARES work teams have visited the center three times and met with the director, Carol Burnett. After hearing her story and learning about the critical services provided by Moore Community House, the steering committee voted to donate funds contributed by the Central Presbyterian Church to CARES. A donation of \$2,000 will be made pending agreement on a specific use for the funds. The Livingston County Coalition of Churches is planning to provide additional support for the services provided by Moore Community House.

Senator Volker Secures Special Member Item for CARES

Livingston CARES has just received a letter from Senator Dale Volker indicating that a member item in the 2007-2008 New York State Budget has been allocated through the SUNY Budget to the Center for Community for support of volunteer work trips to Harrison County, Mississippi. We anticipate the funding will arrive later this summer and will be used to support the 2008 work trips. Livingston CARES thanks Senator Volker for his support of our programs.

Katrina Story Fades But Recovery Work Continues

Livingston CARES made a commitment to continue working in Harrison County, Mississippi long after the stories fade from the media. Participants in the six work-trips have seen the destruction and how important volunteer assistance is to those affected by Katrina. We feel it is very important for contributors and volunteers to know that help will be needed for several more years. Please help CARES with the work and the continuing friendships we have established with the homeowners and leaders in Harrison County, Mississippi.