

Katrina Relief Around the State

In addition to Extension's relief efforts in Alabama counties most directly affected by Katrina, here's a sampling of our other contributions.

- Agents in **Coffee County** and local churches held a September 4 cookout in Pascagoula, Mississippi, where some 2,500 hamburgers were served to residents. They returned later to deliver medical and cleaning supplies.
- **Choctaw County** agents supplied paper goods and utensils for the local shelter and staffed phones for Red Cross.
- **Cleburne County** agents coordinated the transport of 4,000 excess pounds of equine grain from a weigh station on I-20 to Tuscaloosa County.
- **Autauga County** partnered with Faith Full Gospel Baptist Church in Montgomery and Feed the Children to coordinate a food and supply distribution center. They also worked with FEMA and the American Red Cross to meet the needs of evacuees by collecting food, water, supplies, clothing, and other necessities.
- The **Pike County** 4-H Horse Club sponsored a ride-a-thon to raise money for feed, supplies, and other necessities for the New Orleans mounted police whose stables were lost in the storm.
- **Houston County** Extension, with the help of 4-H'ers, continued working with the humane shelter and PetSmart to care for nearly 600 animals housed in the shelter since previous storms. They worked with Paws Away, an Indiana-based animal rescue group, to transport more than 100 dogs to adoptive homes in Indiana.
- **Tuscaloosa County** agents entertained youth and adults at a local shelter with a canvas bag painting project to give evacuees a special place to store their belongings.
- **Geneva County** organized a food and supply drive for coastal Mississippi victims. They sorted 61,000 pounds of items into well-marked boxes that enabled volunteers to distribute the goods without confusion or delay.
- An **Autauga County** 4-H home-school group, Homegrown Kids, partnered with WFSA-12, Lowe's, Central Alabama Electric Cooperative, 105.7 FM, 97.1 FM, the City of Prattville, and other local groups to conduct a fundraising drive September 7 that collected almost \$980,000.
- **Clay County** is sponsoring the "Adopt a Child for Christmas" program to help displaced children and families have a happy Christmas.

Katrina Recovery, Extension Style

Extension Employees Go Beyond Ordinary Roles to Aid Victims

What does the **statewide educational outreach agency** known as the Alabama Cooperative Extension System do when an unspeakable disaster such as Hurricane Katrina strikes? Just what it does best: bring solutions to life's problems to the people who need them most.

Extension's response to Katrina began swiftly after the storm's devastation was recognized. Interim Director Gaines Smith sent a memo to all Extension personnel across the state granting them permission—and encouragement—to devote five days of official time to work with people affected by the storm through recognized relief agencies or faith-based groups.

"Our primary and official role as an organization continues to be education," Smith wrote. "However, the devastation and aftermath (both in economic and human suffering terms) of Hurricane Katrina are different from anything we have ever experienced before. To be able to respond to the unique situation, we are requesting that each of you as ACES employees strongly consider becoming involved in activities that are outside our normal educational role." To ensure accountability of all time spent, a reporting system was put in place.

The response to Smith's call for action was overwhelming, with 252 days reported—more than 2,000 hours of volunteer work. And that's not including the unofficial time Extension employees donated, using vacation days and working weekends in local shelters; collecting and delivering food, water, and clothing to communities along the coast; and being involved in countless other efforts—because Extension people are the sort of folks who just have to help people.

In addition to volunteer work, Extension people geared their regular assignments as much as possible to Katrina-related efforts, meeting needs for information in all the areas of Extension's expertise.

Extension agents in Mobile, Baldwin, and Washington counties worked individually and alongside state Extension specialists as well as in collaboration with other agencies and organizations. They helped document damage to crops and timber, facilitated tours, and helped the local agriculture community put together meetings and programs. They also coordinated volunteer efforts of local civic groups, churches, and agencies to provide assistance to evacuees.

Extension 4-H agents worked with club leaders whose 4-H clubs entertained children in Red Cross shelters, put together hygiene kits, held fund-raisers to help evacuees, and assisted local families whose homes were damaged. One 4-H horse club even provided pony rides for children at a local shelter.

On the administrative level, relief staffing was offered to Mississippi and Louisiana Extension offices. Alabama Extension also collaborated with agencies including Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to coordinate distribution of publications to families located in temporary housing. A 4-H effort is under way to provide coats and jackets for young evacuees. An Extension group also participated in "Triumph Over Tragedy" training offered through the Southern Region Rural Extension Center.

Extension communication specialists produced Web logs, news stories, and video clips relating to Hurricane Katrina and worked with Extension family and child development specialists to produce an instructional DVD/CD on helping children cope with disaster. They assembled 2,000 information packets for families in temporary housing on topics such as food safety, environmental health triggers, and basic recipes. Spanish language public service announcements were developed for distribution in South Alabama.

The final chapter on Hurricane Katrina will not be written for a long time, but, meanwhile, its victims have found much help, comfort, and relief from Extension all over the state. And knowing the Extension family, the help will just keep right on coming.

What Extension Does for You...

Agriculture

Beef cattle producers in Alabama and Mississippi will soon be able to participate in Extension's Master Cattle Producers Training Program via interactive videoconferencing. The high-tech version of the program will be offered in a number of locations around Alabama, including Auburn University, Belle Mina, Headland, Marion Junction, Crossville, and Winfield from January to March. The interactive course is open to producers interested in learning more about management and marketing, nutrition of beef cattle, forage systems, reproduction, health practices and handling, product quality and yield grades, selection for optimum genetics, and beef quality assurance.

Family and Individual Well-Being

More than 120 Alabamians are now able to approach estate planning in ways that line up more closely with their own individual priorities concerning family, children, health care, investments, inheritances, retirement, and other issues, following Extension's recent estate planning conferences held in Montgomery and Huntsville. Topics included "Long-Term Insurance Care," "Elder Laws: Advanced Directives," "Family Options for Leasing Land for Income," "How to Make an Informed Investment Decision," "Social Security," "SenioRX and Medicare Part D Programs," and more.

4-H and Youth Development

Alabama 4-H youth ages 9 to 19 are learning about fishing and field safety, tackle crafting, aquatic ecology, lure selection, and other skills to help them become better anglers as well as better environmental stewards as part of the 4-H sport fishing program. The volunteer instructors for the 4-H program were prepared to work with the youth through an October training class at Lake Point State Park in Eufaula.

Community and Economic Development

Extension and Auburn University are this year celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Intensive Economic Development Training Course, which now boasts more than 600 alumni including some of the state's top economic development professionals. The training course was developed by a former Extension economist in 1985. After a brief period when it was coordinated by Auburn's Economic Development Institute, Extension is once again serving as the lead agency, with EDI support. Other support comes from the Economic Development Association of Alabama, Alabama Gas Corporation, Alabama Electric Cooperative, Alabama Power Company, and BellSouth.

Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs


Urban Extension agent Hayes Jackson and trained volunteers of the Calhoun County Urban Horticulture Program helped transform the grounds of the Anniston Museum of Natural History into an official Alabama Botanical Garden. Museum officials say the now lush botanical garden resulting from years of hard work and planning by the volunteers is encouraging museum visitors to spend more time lingering through the exhibit halls, gardens, and park area. As a result, Jackson received the Berman Museum's 2005 Volunteer of the Year award, with the museum winning the Calhoun County Beautification Award.

Forestry, Wildlife, and Natural Resource Management

Water monitoring serves as a safeguard against pollution of our water resources. Extension collaborates with Alabama Water Watch, dedicated to developing citizen volunteer monitoring of Alabama's lakes, streams, and coasts. Workshops focus on how to monitor physical, chemical, and biological variables of water. Last year, 67 citizen groups submitted water data to the AWW office, and 80 percent of this information was sent online via the AWW Web site. Since AWW began in 1992, more than 4,000 citizens have been certified in 1,000 workshops, and they have tested water quality at 1,800 sites on 600 bodies of water.

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Gaines Smith, Extension Director, Interim


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