

ALUMNI/AE OFFICE TO SPONSOR 'NON SIBI' SERVICE TRIP TO NEW ORLEANS

From June 12 to 18, Exeter's Alumni/ae Affairs Office is sponsoring a unique travel opportunity for members of the school community: a *non sibi* service trip to hurricane-ravaged New Orleans. There, Exeter volunteers will help convert an abandoned school building in the city's Carrollton neighborhood into a charter high school and community center.

The idea for the New Orleans trip actually began half a world away. In August 2005, the Alumni/ae Affairs Office sponsored its first *non sibi* trip, part of the international response to the tsunami that struck Southeast Asia in December 2004. In all, 40 Exeter alumni/ae, faculty, staff, students and family members joined a multinational workforce in Khao Lak, Thailand, assisting on such projects as boat-building, tent-making, waste removal and house construction.

Says Harold Brown '74, director of alumni/ae affairs and the trip's coordinator, "I cannot remember a time when I was more aware of the power of *non sibi*. Our acts were reciprocated by equal and unexpected acts of love on the part of the people *we* came to help. Although the work was strenuous and the heat and humidity oppressive, no one wanted to leave."

Kimberly Sommers '07 says the trip to Thailand, which she made with her father, David Sommers '64, "completely changed my life. Now I plan to join the Peace Corps after I finish school. It was good to get away from American culture. Over there, it didn't matter what clothes you wore or what car you drove. People simply appreciated that you were there for them."

As the group flew home, steeped in the impact of the experience, they vowed to initiate a service project domestically. Within days of their return, nature made the decision for them. Hurricane Katrina struck, decimating New Orleans.

It was while brainstorming with Acting Principal Tom Hassan and School Minister Robert Thompson '72 on ways to involve the entire Academy community in relief efforts to the Gulf region, Brown recalls, that the idea of a support project that included actually partnering with local residents emerged.

Through a local chapter of the United Way, Brown was put in contact with Susan Burge, director of the School to Career Institute, which was already working to open a charter high school in the hard-pressed Carrollton neighborhood of New Orleans before Katrina.

The new charter school's home will be the now-abandoned Alfred C. Priestly Middle School building. The Carrollton United Neighborhood Organization plans to renovate the building not only as a charter high school, but also as a community center housing adult career training programs, health programs and after-school care. It's a huge undertaking, Burge admits, but one with the potential to revitalize an entire neighborhood.

Brown explains, "The Carrollton project feels right because it allows Exeter to have an ongoing relationship with a community in the Gulf region, something that our project in Southeast Asia lacked."

Volunteers of all skill levels are welcome, and will assist with neighborhood home repairs as well as the school renovation project. Burge promises hard work and hot days, but adds, "Don't expect we're going to work you till you can't breathe. We're going to feed you New Orleans cuisine and entertain you New Orleans style."

Exeter volunteers will also have the opportunity to work alongside Carrollton residents, says Burge, who are intent on renewing their school, their homes and the neighborhood, not only for themselves, but to serve as a model of neighborhood revitalization that can be used nationwide. "It all begins with a neighborhood saying this is what we want, not with outsiders coming in and saying this is what you need to do," she says. "They are working on faith towards a dream, and want to engage Exeter in that dream. We hope this is the beginning of a long relationship."

For more information about the trip, contact Harold Brown Jr. '74, director of alumni/ae affairs, at hbrown@exeter.edu or (603) 777-3353.



Director of Alumni/ae Affairs Harold Brown '74 (above) visited New Orleans' Ninth Ward in February (above left). In June, he will lead a non sibi service trip to the hurricane-ravaged city, where Exeter volunteers will help restore an abandoned school in the Carrollton neighborhood.