

NON SIBI IN NEW ORLEANS:

EXETER VOLUNTEERS HELP REPAIR TWO SCHOOLS AND A CHURCH

Non sibi is a driving force at Exeter. Earlier this summer, more than 70 Exeter alumni/ae, faculty, staff, students and family members brought that force to New Orleans to help the neighborhood of Carrollton rebuild after Hurricane Katrina—the second such community service trip organized by Exeter.

Harold Brown '74—Exeter's director of alumni/ae affairs and organizer of Exeter's first *non sibi* service trip to Thailand last summer to assist with tsunami relief efforts—spearheaded the weeklong New Orleans project, which involved clearing out furniture and debris from two mold-infested schools, the Johnson Elementary School and the Priestley High School, and repairing the



(A) More than 70 Exeter alumni/ae, faculty, staff, students and family members traveled to New Orleans in June as part of Exeter's second annual *non sibi* service trip. Dressed for work in dust masks and Mardi Gras beads, volunteers gather outside the Johnson Elementary School, one of two schools they helped clean in the Carrollton neighborhood. (B) The trip was organized by Harold Brown '74, director of alumni/ae affairs, shown here with Carrollton school board member Mary Green. (C-E) Exeter volunteers like Ken McElheny '54 (D) and Peter Lam '07 (E) hauled out a small mountain of desks, bookcases and detritus from the two mold-infested schools, both of which were untouched since Katrina struck. (F,G) Volunteers including development staffer Amy Bevan (G) also helped repair the Greater St. John Missionary Baptist Church.



Greater St. John Missionary Baptist Church. Brown worked with the Carrollton United Neighborhood Organization to define priorities for the trip. "Local residents see reopening neighborhood schools as key to bringing Carrollton back to life," says Brown, who was delighted to be able to tie the group's work to an educational project.

More than a few volunteers made the trip with family members, including Allison Pennock '05 and her father, Jonathan. Allison graduated from Exeter last year, but says she still feels "deeply connected to its motto of *non sibi*." She also feels connected to the gulf region. Before they moved to the Exeter area in 2002, the Pennocks lived in Mobile, AL, where, she says, they saw "first-hand the destruction hurricanes cause."

"Although we were safe in New Hampshire [when Katrina struck], we were immersed in the storm coverage as if we were there," says Jonathan Pennock, who is director of the marine program at the University of New Hampshire. Working on the Carrollton project was, he adds, a way of showing "my deep respect for those who have chosen to stay in New Orleans and remake their lives."

The Exeter volunteers worked long hours in the June heat to lay the groundwork for the reopening of the schools. "We couldn't believe some of what we found," says Brown. "Nothing had been done to the buildings or grounds since Katrina hit." In Carrollton and neighboring areas, Katrina's devastation still defines peoples' lives. "I've never seen anything like it," says Brown of the damage he observed in New Orleans. "In the Ninth Ward you still see houses ripped open by the storm, with the remains of a family's life in full view—photo albums, books, everything."

As the Exeter team worked, word got around. Local residents welcomed the volunteers



HAROLD BROWN

warmly and helped them make sure their efforts were addressing the most important local needs. “Every time a passing car honked its horn or people stopped to ask us what we were doing, I realized that we were giving them hope,” says Molly Boal '08, one of 14 Exeter students to participate in the trip.

The reaction was positive across the board. “One woman came out of her doorway, clapping her hands and yelling, “There’s a wave of angels coming down my street!” says a visibly touched Brown.

On the first day, local organizers divided the Exeter group into 10 separate teams. By day two, the Exeter volunteers came together and worked as a single unit. “The local organizers couldn’t believe how such a large group could work together so efficiently and productively,” says Brown, who credits “the Exeter spirit” for the sense of teamwork that prevailed.

The team’s work consisted of large acts—clearing the schools of everything that could be moved—and small—a butterfly-attracting shrub purchased privately by one of the Exeter volunteers and planted in the schoolyard as a welcoming note for Carrollton students.

By trip’s end, Exeter volunteers had emptied the entire Johnson Elementary School and the first floor of the Priestley High School, resulting in a seven-foot high pile of desks, bookcases and detritus. Both schools plan to reopen after professional cleaning crews scour the inside and essential repairs are completed. Priestley will borrow space in a nearby charter school, the McNair Middle

School, until the building is approved for occupancy. Once reopened, Priestley will host academic and community center activities, including adult training programs, health programs and after-school care. Priestley students will assist in ongoing renovations of their school.

AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP

“One of the biggest benefits of this trip,” says Brown, “was that we cemented a relationship with the local residents.” Carrollton faces many unknowns—enrollment for the schools is dependent on how many families with children move back into the neighborhood;

teaching staff still needs to be hired and much repair work remains to be done. “We look forward to having an opportunity to provide more help to Carrollton in the future,” adds Brown.

And by all accounts, Exeter will have plenty of volunteers for a return trip. “It was a huge bonding experience for everyone in the group,” says Molly Boal. “Going on this trip made me realize that I could do something like this, and I will do it again.”

The relief trip was organized with the assistance of the United Way, the Carrollton United Neighborhood Organization and the Greater St. John Missionary Baptist Church, all of which provided on-site support to the Exeter participants, including food and housing.



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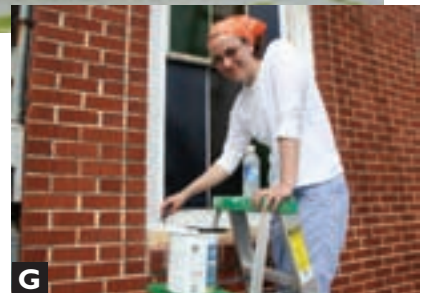


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