

Winter 2007: Winter Break's Gulf Coast Trip, A New College Minor, MLK Day Activities, Campus Holiday Giving, December First Friday, and more...

Images of Katrina

By Diane M. Bell

The story depicts the events during a recent winter break trip to the Mississippi Gulf Coast and New Orleans, LA to aid in the continued hurricane relief efforts. The trip was led by Diane Bell, Director of the Community Service Center. Student participants were Michelle Bohler, Teresa Carr, Benvinda Cardoso, Joel Edwards, Nathan Farnum, Kylie Hirl, Shannon Oliver, Blake Ruehrwein, Mike Scally, Sean Sousa, Shavonne Vance, Lindsey Waller, Katelyn Welch and Kerry Wells. The trip was made possible from generous funding by President Dana Mohler-Faria and outstanding planning by David Brooking, Assistant Director for the Office of Community Service Learning at The University of Southern Mississippi.

Although it's been a few weeks since we returned to Bridgewater from the Gulf Coast of Mississippi and New Orleans, LA, I can still see the images like it was yesterday or just a minute ago. I can still see the images of 14 tired-looking students standing around the carousel in the baggage claim area at Louis Armstrong Airport in New Orleans. They had no idea how this trip would change them and the lives of others.

The 1.5 hour drive to Hattiesburg, MS was filled with images, some outside of the van window and others through my rearview mirror. Outside, I could still see the devastation in the city of New Orleans as we traveled along Interstate 10 East toward Slidell, LA. Immediately, one student pointed out to me how all of the trees looked dead, hundreds and

hundreds of them. I can still see the eerie images of a deserted Six Flags theme park with a skeletal roller coaster and a Toys R Us that no child would want to visit in what looked like a bombed out strip mall.

From my rearview mirror, I saw the images of students who didn't know each other but would soon share a common bond with one another. We were all about to become a part of American history, of World history, of a larger team of volunteers ready to lend a hand after over a year since Hurricane Katrina spread her wrath upon this city as well as others in Mississippi and Alabama.

We arrived at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Hattiesburg where we were warmly greeted by Linda McLain and Betsy, her cat. I can still see the image of this small lady who shared her personal story of how Katrina shattered her life in Waveland, MS. She lost everything - her husband, her house - yet this small woman had not lost her spirit and faith.

On Sunday, we drove an hour south on Highway 49 toward the Gulf Coast of Mississippi to join a large group of students from New England College, located in Henniker, NH, who were

house where we were staying. As the rain pounded, many of the BSC students silently wondered if the people in this city were afraid of rain, afraid of another storm like Katrina heading their way.

As we walked toward Goodwill Missionary Baptist Church for the Sunday morning worship service, I noticed the images of a small town that looked like a war torn area you see in other countries, not here



in our country. No homes, no businesses, nothing. Just rubbish, more dead trees and concrete foundations where houses once stood. The church had been rebuilt and its parishioners returned every Sunday to this place of worship, although there didn't seem to be anything in this town to return to. Next to the church I saw a beige shower stall and a white toilet still in its place in what used to be somebody's house. I can still see the image of this African American church welcoming a group of predominately Caucasian students and volunteers; the images of BSC students, feeling welcomed and right at home as they rejoiced with the parishioners.



volunteering in Pass Christian, MS during their winter break. The images of the Army-like tents where they slept and the sound of the torrential rain that morning made us appreciate the small church

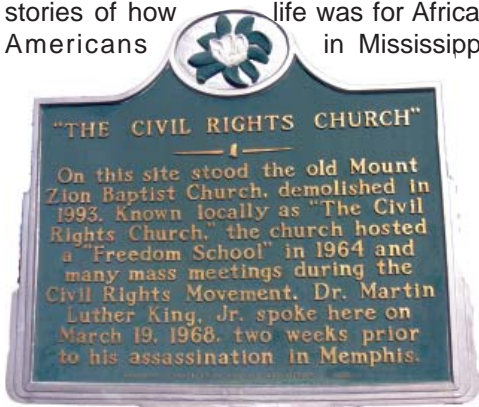
After a tour of the devastation in Pass Christian, we said goodbye to our new friends from New England College and traveled down Highway 90 along the beach front to the cities of Gulfport and Biloxi. In my mind, I saw the image of what Highway 90 used to look like when I visited the area a few years ago while living in Atlanta -

beautiful Southern mansions overlooking the Mississippi Gulf Coast beaches of white sand. Now the image was different. Grass and branches that appeared to



grow out of the sand; FEMA trailers in front of concrete foundations; a gutted Waffle House and Olive Garden restaurant; concrete steps leading up to what used to be a house; shells of many Shell gas stations. And more dead trees. In need of a mental break, we took some time to play like kids on the beach, even though signs warned us not to get into the water.

On Monday we toured historical landmarks in Hattiesburg. Our first stop was to the African American Military Museum where we received a lecture and tour by Iola Williams. I can still see the image of the military uniforms and artifacts proudly displayed in this former USO site and the front of the brochure which read "Service and Sacrifice". Next we boarded a trolley car and toured sites on the Mississippi Freedom Summer Trail, commemorating Hattiesburg's Civil Rights movement of 1964. Peggy Jean Conner, who had been arrested for fighting for the civil rights of African Americans in the south, told us stories of how life was for African Americans in Mississippi.



I can still see the image of the church where we stopped that marked one of the final places where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke before he was assassinated two weeks later in Memphis, TN.

Over the next three days, my mind was filled with the images of BSC students

hammering and sawing and painting and cleaning on the site where two homes were being built by the Hattiesburg Area Habitat for Humanity affiliate. Images of a few students taking a tumble in the Mississippi red clay mud, images of a student perched high installing the roof on a house, images of a student who had injured his collarbone, still in a sling, painting and working as if he had no injuries at all, images of the essence of teamwork – our students working together to turn piles of lumber into a home for a family displaced by Hurricane Katrina.



I can't forget the image of Mary and her son, who lived in the Habitat home across the street from where we worked. She told us the story of her survival during the storm. I remember asking her if she was angry. She proudly said "No. That was God's work. He made us all stronger from this storm. He made people start talking to other people." Once again, we saw the image of how faith guided these people through the storm.

On our last day at the Habitat site, I took out my digital camera to look at the images of what these houses looked like on Day One of the project and what they looked



like at 4:30pm on Day Three. No one could believe what we had accomplished in just three days. The images of our students saying goodbye to our Habitat crew - "Uncle Earl", Glenn and Mike - and to our volunteer buddies Dan and Brad from New York; the images of sadness because we had just one more day on the Gulf Coast to make a difference.

We rose early Friday morning to make the long drive from Hattiesburg back to New Orleans, where we embarked upon a truly unique service project. We drove to Lafayette Cemetery No. 2 for a clean up and restoration project in one of the 40

city-owned cemeteries. Louise Fergusson Saenz, from Save Our Cemeteries, Inc., gave us a brief history of this cemetery. The surrounding neighborhood was



so bad that we needed police escort even to go out for water in the van. The images of the grave sites, one that read "Munster" (I kid you not); the images of BSC students dripping with sweat in the New Orleans humidity while they cleaned debris and picked weeds, careful to replace any human bones on top of the graves, the images of just after three hours of work, what a difference we made.

After the project we boarded a bus to get a first hand look at the devastation in New Orleans and its parishes. Images of the water marks to see how high the water rose in the city; images of a roof where a man broke through to be rescued; images of neighborhoods where no one lived; rows and rows of FEMA trailers; the distinct markings on the houses that let you know when the house was inspected, if there was gas on, who inspected and the all important number below – if any bodies were found; images of a house that read "2 cats found"



and "Donnie and Lisa R OK"; images of Musician's Row, brightly colored houses being built by Habitat for Humanity for New Orleans musicians; signs of a city trying to rebuild itself; images of a city in such despair.

After the tour, we relaxed and enjoyed the French Quarter and its famous Bourbon Street. Images of street performers; sounds of New Orleans jazz; images of BSC students catching beads



as the city began its Mardi Gras celebration; a city that reveled in its Saints team making it to the NFL playoffs; images of Creole dishes of jambalaya, gumbo and crawfish etouffee at the restaurant where we dined; images of the French Quarter alive and vibrant, despite the devastation surrounding the city.



Our final resting spot was India House Hostel, a funky, kind of retro place that was a bit frightening but the staff was quite friendly. None of us had ever stayed in a youth hostel before. The images of India House Hostel were, well, let's just say, totally different from the church house in Hattiesburg. Believe me; everyone was excited to leave the next morning to board the flight back to Boston.



I returned to Bridgewater on Monday morning, ready to greet student volunteers on our annual MLK Day of Service. Images of students lined up to get their MLK Day t-shirts; images of a few students I had just spent one unforgettable week with. They looked tired but still eager to make a difference in our local community. These are the images of Katrina that I will always remember.

New Minor is a Major Development

This semester BSC has introduced a new minor, incorporating twelve academic disciplines. The Civic Education and Community Leadership minor was created by Dr. George Serra, chairperson of the Political Science department and Director of the Center for Legislative Studies and Dr. Mark Kemper, professor of Political Science and Assistant Director of the Center for Legislative Studies, in response to the College's commitment to service learning as well as to studies indicating that colleges nationwide fail to teach civic literacy.

Developed as a way for non-majors to gain knowledge and understanding of civic leadership and engagement, Serra foresees the minor appealing to a wide range of students. "By incorporating courses from a broad spectrum of disciplines, we hope to attract students from a variety of backgrounds and interests."



Drs. Kemper and Serra in the office

Although such a diverse group of courses (ten from the School of Arts and Science, two from the School of Business) comprise the minor, it is coordinated by the Center for Legislative Studies as the center is already involved in civic education programming. Serra and Kemper, along with Dr. Tracy Osborn, assistant professor in political science and research fellow for the Center for Legislative Studies, are in the process of developing an application for a grant through the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). The FIPSE grant would be used for the minor to help provide faculty with course development funds, students with resources to support conference travel, etc.

Dr. Kemper explains that "The minor is unique in that it encompasses service learning, social justice, and civic participation. Other colleges have generally focused on just one of these components." Ten students are currently enrolled in the foundation course, POLI 201 Foundations of Citizenship and Community Leadership, an impressive response for a new offering. The Community Service Center extends its support and congratulations to those who have worked so hard to introduce this important new addition to BSC's curriculum. For more information, interested students are encouraged to visit www.bridgew.edu/CLS/civicedminor.cfm or contact Dr. Serra at 508-531-2417.

Gingerbread Holiday Ornaments

by Cindi Lawless

On Friday December 1, 2006, fifty-two Bridgewater State College students and staff could be found in One Park Ave. from 12 noon until 2 P.M. decorating gingerbread men, women, and houses with brightly colored glitter paints. These bedazzled ornaments, donated to children from families receiving Jumpstart's Baskets of Love, helped make the holiday season a little more joyful.



Pizza and cookies were served to volunteers to make the decorating a little sweeter and more enjoyable. One hundred adorable and delightful gingerbread ornaments were distributed throughout forty-five baskets. This event was cosponsored by the Community Service Center and Kappa Delta Phi; these organizations offer community service activities every first Friday of the month in One Park Ave. in the Campus Center. Join us some Friday to help make someone else's day more pleasant!



Keep informed of news and events by visiting our website:
www.bridgew.edu/CommunityService

A Day On for Many

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was a cold, rainy day in Bridgewater, but that didn't stop dozens of volunteers from turning out to make it a successful day of volunteerism. Wearing their black MLK Day t-shirts, BSC students and staff headed to various service opportunities arranged by Diane Bell, director of the Community Service Center.

The largest number of participants headed to Cradles to Crayons, an organization which works to provide low-income



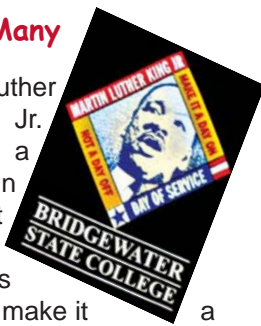
children with the essentials needed for health, education, and well-being.

You may remember that newly-elect Governor Deval Patrick asked his inaugural ball attendees to donate new shoes for this charity. The forty-five volunteers from BSC were instrumental in sorting the thousands of donated shoes as well as other items in the North Quincy warehouse.

Another twelve students visited the Children's Museum in Easton, where they worked with children making "peace doves": origami birds with written messages, which were then placed on a tree. This



museum is known for its meaningful remembrances of Dr. King and his work, and the volunteers were moved by the children's insightful participation. Boston Rescue Mission, a facility which serves as a homeless shelter, rehab facility, and a re-entry program



for female ex-offenders, was the site for another nine volunteers. From cleaning the thin mats used for the street people who stay overnight to serving a meal for residents, the volunteers quickly gained an



appreciation for their own living conditions. Lastly, thirty-five individuals remained on campus to work with young visitors from Nativity Preparatory School of New Bedford. They engaged in a rousing game of "Dizzy Bat" as well as "Jeopardy", where they were required to answer trivia questions ranging from the topics of the life of MLK to geography to Black History.



The day of service was a successful one in so many ways, not the least of which was the participants' gratitude for the opportunity to serve. Many of those involved were surprised to find that they gained so much satisfaction and contentment in their own lives after helping others, and are reminded of this quote attributed to Buddha: "Before giving, the mind of the giver is happy; while giving, the mind of the giver is made peaceful; and having given, the mind of the giver is uplifted."

Give Yourself a Pat on the Back

Once again, the BSC community has proved itself to be a philanthropic group with the various holiday-giving opportunities across the campus. The Community Service Center was privileged to be a part of initiatives by Jumpstart and the Office of Student Affairs that benefited hundreds of local residents.

Student Affairs coordinated contributions

Upcoming and Ongoing Events

February 11-17
Random Acts of Kindness Week

Saturdays February 24, March 31, and April 14 (tentative)
Habitat for Humanity, Plymouth, MA

Dates TBA
Jumpstart's Fairy Godmother Project

March 12-16
Tour de Service: various service opportunities around the state

March 15-16
Jimmy V Team vs. Cancer Fundraiser. More info to follow.

Fridays March 2, April 6
Join us in One Park Ave. in the Campus Center for First Fridays of Service. 12:00-2:00pm, drop-in.

of non-perishable food items for the Bridgewater Food Pantry, an "emergency use" program located at the Academy Building in Bridgewater Center. Stan Kravitz, a Pantry volunteer, said officials were grateful for the generous donations of sixteen bags and five boxes of groceries, and indicated the town had many families in need.



Rich Henderson, Jumpstart Volunteer, and some of the Baskets of Love

Jumpstart, under the direction of site manager Cathleen McMahon, continued its traditional program Baskets of Love. Forty-one campus offices, organizations, and individuals were successful in providing baskets that overflowed with clothing, books, toys, food, and personal items for low-income families from the greater Brockton, Taunton, and Raynham area. These contributions, with an estimated value of over \$6500, made the holiday season a little bit happier for 46 grateful families.