

NEWS

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UConn Students Spend Spring Break in Unconventional Way

2,200 Volunteer Hours Contributed to Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts

STORRS, C.T., March 23, 2007 – Over 140 recently-gutted apartments in New Orleans, L.A. will be available for low-income housing in late 2008. Traveling 30 hours each way by bus, 55 University of Connecticut (UConn) students and four supporting staff members participated in this Office of Community Outreach Alternative Spring Break trip from March 3rd to 11th, 2007. Setting aside the opportunity for a “traditional” college Spring Break, students embarked on a memorable week of service in New Orleans.

Students not only planned and executed the trip, but also contributed out-of-pocket money to help fund the experience. A diverse group of individuals, from seasoned Alternative Break trip participants to first-timers, took part in the trip. “It didn’t matter what background each student came from, because when they got there they were all standing in front of the same debris,” said Devika Dhandapani, one of the two student Trip Directors.

UConn Community Outreach collaborated with Catholic Charities and Christopher Homes, Inc. to make this particular trip happen. This is not, however, Community Outreach’s first alternative break or even first time to the Gulf Coast region. Since Hurricane Katrina,

UConn students have coordinated a trip to Mississippi in 2005, a trip to New Orleans during Spring Break 2005 as well as a subsequent trip in May of 2006; these trips encompassed 93 students and 3,700 hours of service in total. During Spring Break this year while students were on the trip to New Orleans, another group of UConn students spent the week in Philadelphia, P.A. on a trip addressing the issue of healthcare.

This fall, UConn Community Outreach was recognized by the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, specifically being given a Distinction for General Community Service as well as receiving a Katrina Compassion Award for Excellence in Hurricane Relief Service. "This honor recognizes the continuing commitment of UConn students to Hurricane Relief efforts. Nineteen months after the disaster, students have shown that they haven't stopped thinking about the Gulf Coast or about taking initiatives to do something about the destruction that is still there," said Matt Farley, Coordinator of Community Outreach at UConn.

One volunteer hour of service translates to \$17 the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) doesn't need to spend on relief; this trip consequently saved FEMA approximately \$37,400! The UConn group on this Spring Break was told that a group of volunteers their size is a rare sight to be seen in the New Orleans area, which reinforces the need for future trips. Community Outreach students have already begun to plan such trips; it is evident that this is trip is not the last the Gulf Coast will see of UConn students.

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