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Ten Years of Group Mission Trips

August 2015 marked the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina as well as the tenth anniversary of the World Renew DRS Group Mission Trip program. The devastation caused by Katrina on the Gulf Coast and the beginning of the DRS groups program are connected. Over the last decade, many people who experienced a disaster in North America have been able to rebuild, recover, and restart their lives with the help of volunteer groups from DRS.

In 2005, World DRS was a much smaller endeavor than it is today. The volunteer opportunities DRS offered at that time were designed almost exclusively for retirees on two- or three-week assignments. However, after Hurricane Katrina occurred, many North American congregations wanted to send people from their church on a mission trip to help survivors on the gulf, and the DRS program didn't fit the needs of

volunteers who wanted to serve as a group.

In response to the desire of these church members to serve those in need together, World Renew DRS developed the Group Mission Trip program. It was initially built on World Renew DRS's established relationships with local recovery groups across North America, and it expanded those connections to include host locations for volunteer groups. Over the last decade, the program has grown as it provided flexible opportunities for volunteers from the U.S. and Canada to volunteer around North America where disasters have occurred.

The opportunities for groups to volunteer in the first five years of the program were mostly located in the Katrina area. Since then the effort has spread, and World Renew DRS

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Ron Willett, director of World Renew Disaster Response Services.

World Renew Disaster Response Services' Mission is:

To show God's love and bring hope to disaster-impacted communities in North America by restoring the homes and lives of those who are most vulnerable,

To help communities build their capacity to prepare for and recover from disasters, and,

To provide opportunities for Christians to honor the Lord by using their time, talents, and financial resources in service to others.

Letter from the Director

Greetings in the mighty name of Jesus Christ!

Since we wrapped up our flood recovery work in High River, Alberta, this fall, my thoughts have been with the homeowners that DRS volunteers encountered there. We have been serving the people of High River for two years. This month a team of volunteers spent a week packing up all of our tools, emptying out the house we called home, hitching up the trailer, and getting the vehicles ready to drive back to Byron Center, Michigan. So many thoughts and memories, and a lot of wonderful work will be our legacy in High River.

In those two years, more than 430 DRS volunteers worked on 41 homes in High River. They gave over 32,500 hours of service, and our case managers helped to restore hope among 315 struggling families. The resilience and hope we found among the people of High River was tremendous. Even in the hard times, the townspeople embraced World Renew and all who came to help. On my last visit there, I was thanked everywhere I went for helping to restore the life of the community.

The first time I traveled to High River was in June 2014. One of the things I saw was an empty lot where a house once stood. All that was left was a garage that our volunteers were working to drywall and renovate. In July, I went to the same lot and found a brand new house — a house that DRS volunteers built together with Mennonite volunteers. I met the couple that lived there and heard their story. They are both in their 70s and barely had time to climb onto their roof when the flood hit. They waited there for three hours and were finally rescued by a crew in a boat and taken to safety.

This is just one story of the people we help get back into their homes – there are hundreds more like it. It illustrates the wonderful work that each of you do as you show the love of Christ in communities where disasters have hit. To each of you that took time away from your family, I am so thankful to God for all that you've done in High River. You made a huge difference in the lives of over 315 families. You were indeed the hands and feet of Jesus Christ!

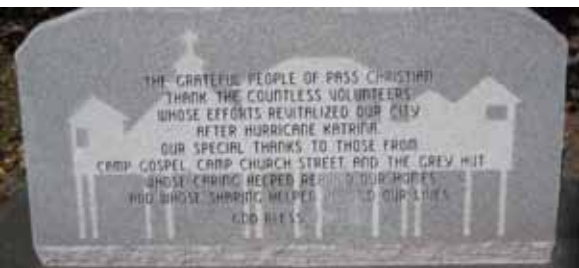
I want to specifically thank some very special people who gave a great amount of their time in High River. Thanks to Linda and Henry Visscher who served as project managers, giving so much of their time to coordinate this project. I am very thankful for Angie and Joel Ploegstra who graciously volunteered as construction managers after Mike Gorchynski concluded his time with us. Also I wish to say thank you to a couple who served in many different ways in High River from beginning to end: our sincere thank you to Al and Trynette Brander, DRS volunteers who live in High River and provided much guidance and assistance.

May God continue to bless each and every one of you as you display God's love and peace among those He calls us to serve.

Joyfully in Christ, for God is good!

Ron Willett, Director
World Renew Disaster Response Services

A Katrina Tenth Anniversary Event



Over the summer, DRS unmet needs assessment leaders Ben and Char Dykema visited eastern Mississippi to attend an event called “A Katrina Remembrance.” While there, the Dykemas visited many of the places where World Renew DRS worked in Mississippi and Louisiana.

“A Katrina Remembrance” was held to thank the many volunteers that came to help residents of the Gulf Coast recover from Katrina over the last ten years.

“The keynote speaker was former Mississippi governor, Haley Barbour,” Char Dykema said. “We were astounded when Mr. Barbour later walked up to us and introduced himself. We were thanked again for our efforts.

“I am sure that Mr. Barbour would want us to pass along his gratitude to you also,” Char said.

World Renew DRS would also like to extend their thanks to the many volunteers, constituents, and prayer partners. “Without the faithful support of our volunteers, DRS could not provide the response needed to communities that were devastated by Katrina,” said DRS Volunteer Manager Becky Purdom.

In the Words of a Green Shirt

A First-Time DRS Volunteer Struggles with the Transition to the Real World

by Carrie Hines

I got home from my DRS volunteer trip in New Jersey and thought that life would go on unchanged. I may have been lulled into complacency by my husband’s snoring, which kept me awake in the same way as my DRS roommate’s. But when I went to my home church on Sunday, I almost automatically grabbed my neighbor’s hands and quickly shot them into the air in the victory “V” sign each time I heard the word “rejoice”—until a deacon spoke to me.

My husband was a dear and tried to help me with the transition by making a great dinner on Sunday. I sat in my usual spot at the end of the counter, but when I tried to pass to the left, the food kept crashing onto the floor.

On Monday I got up at 6:00 a.m., put on my green shirt, and headed for the table. Breakfast did not appear magically in front of me. In addition, my laundry wasn’t neatly folded on the table, and there were dirty dishes in the sink.

The worst was when I returned to work at my massage practice. The client didn’t object too much to the drywall mud I smoothed on her, but she got mad when I brought out the sanding blocks and went to town. Then she jumped up and ran out of the room when I came at her with a roll of tape to fill in the bigger cracks!

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now sends groups on mission trips nearly every week of the year across the continent.

As the World Renew DRS Group Mission Trip program turns ten, there are invigorating trends in volunteerism that are important to the future of group volunteer work.

Last year, 28 percent of DRS group volunteers were under the age of 18, indicating that the program is resonating with today’s youth. At the same time, a high percentage of adult volunteers who are very skilled and make great contributions toward reconstruction efforts remain active members of the DRS group program.

While the DRS staff diligently tracks and cares about these trends and numbers, the stories of impact and transformation are a true inspiration. *It’s all about God’s grace.*

That grace is not only the impact that group volunteers have on the disaster survivors that they are serving — it’s also about DRS volunteers testifying to God’s work in their own lives and in the lives of their teammates. Once a volunteer serves with World Renew DRS, an overwhelming majority indicate that they are eager to serve with DRS again!

To plan a mission trip for your church, school, or family, see Group Mission Trips at worldrenew.net/drs or call 800-848-5818.

Across North America, DRS Volunteers Respond

DRS-Managed Reconstruction Sites

As project managers on the **Ocean County, New Jersey**, reconstruction site, Rich and Phyl Grevenstuk are lining up a lot of work for volunteers. Our partner in New Jersey has a long list of homes that were damaged by Super-Storm Sandy and need work. They are also concerned that many cases have fallen through the cracks. DRS may conduct another unmet needs assessment to find more homeowners who have housing needs related to Hurricane Sandy.

Our work site in **High River, Alberta** has closed, and it is always difficult to say goodbye. We met many wonderful people in High River and made many friends. Project Managers Henry and Linda Visscher and Construction Managers Joel and Angie Ploegstra kept a well-run site. We want to thank them for the many hours they gave so that people could return to their homes. Thank you!

The **Pensacola, Florida** site will reopen in September, ready for volunteers to once again head south. Project Managers Don and Gert Vos are part of the first team to arrive there this fall, and they will line up work for the rest of 2015.

Unmet Needs Assessment

Garry and Lynne Den Besten led a team of 24 volunteers in the Detroit area in August, one year after historic flooding affected thousands of residents in eastern Michigan. This team is working in the hardest hit area and will determine if it is necessary to send a second team.

Rich and Pat Grasman have been working with a long-term recovery



group (LTRG) in Coal City, Illinois, after a tornado caused damage there in June 2015. In September, a DRS unmet needs assessment team canvassed the area to help locate those who need assistance.

Carrie and Len Blauwkamp were in Texas this summer, working with LTRGs in several areas after numerous tornadoes and floods affected homeowners in the region. An unmet needs assessment team led by Walt and Carol Ackerman worked in Austin in mid-September to identify those who need assistance. Len and Carrie also conducted four Tools and Training Workshops in Texas in August.

Jay De Boer is working with the LTRG in the Okanogan, Washington, area after wild fires caused significant damage there. Jay also recently became involved the recovery efforts in Lusk, Wyoming, after unexpected

flooding occurred. Reconstruction volunteers have been scheduled to help with repairs in September and October.

Building Estimating

In July, Estimators Ken and Donna Westveer were in Austin, Texas, assisting the LTRG with reconstruction estimates for flood- and tornado-damaged homes. The LTRG is following up with scheduling homes for reconstruction work.

Disaster Preparedness

If a tornado hit your town on the week night that your youth group meets, would your young people know where to go for safety? Do you know who to check on in your congregation after a disaster because they are disabled or depend on electricity for their health? Who would go to their homes to check on their safety and wellbeing? **Make a plan for your church and family with World Renew's Disaster Preparedness plan. You can find an easy to follow, step-by-step process at worldrenew.net/prepare-disasters.**



Tony and Jennie DeWeerd are retiring from their role as regional project managers. Thank you for all of your work, Tony and Jennie!

Regional Project Managers

We want to thank our Regional Project Managers (RPMs) for the work they do in their regions with LTRGs, attending meetings, participating in training events, assisting other RPMs, and the many other responsibilities they have.

We want to thank Doug Guikema for the work he did to make unmet needs assessments happen in Detroit, Michigan. THANK YOU, DOUG, for the endless hours you spent on the phone, writing emails, and traveling back and forth to Detroit!

We are grateful to Tony and Jenny De Weerd for the many years they have served as regional project managers in Eastern Canada. Tony



A team of eleven people volunteered for clean-up in Crawford County, Michigan.

and Jenny worked endless hours, attended many meetings, joined numerous conference calls, and much more. Thank you, Tony and Jennie! We are pleased to announce that Bruce and Christine de Boer, from London, Ontario, have graciously accepted this role as of August 2015.

Rapid Response

DRS rapid response teams provide clean up in the first few days after a disaster when communities are in critical need of assistance, especially where residents were already living in poverty. Bridge Creek, Oklahoma, was one of these communities. We are grateful to our rapid response team for taking our equipment to

Bridge Creek, and to the volunteers who joined in cleaning up after a tornado from as far away as California!

When an unusual straight-line windstorm hit Michigan in early August, DRS rapid response volunteers answered a request from an emergency manager in northern Michigan. Elderly and low income families were encouraged by the assistance of our volunteers as they removed downed trees from roofs and yards.

If you are not currently on our rapid response email list and would like to be informed about opportunities to serve shortly after a disaster, please call or email our office.



In Memory Of

We recognize the following volunteers who passed away in 2014 and were not recognized in the January or June *Spotlights* in 2015. Thank you to their family members for letting us know.

**John DeHaan
Donald Kracker**

If you know of a World Renew DRS volunteer who passed away in 2014 who has not been mentioned here, please let us know so we can recognize them in an upcoming issue of *Spotlight*.

A Blast from the Past



Volunteers stand in front of the ServeMobile in Homestead, Florida, in 1993.

A New Director for World Renew



“I am honored to take on the U.S. directorship at World Renew, with great joy and hope for the work that the organization accomplishes,” says Carol Bremer-Bennett. “World Renew is a life-changing organization, showing compassion and alleviating poverty by caring for the orphaned, widowed, displaced, hungry, and neediest people of the world.”

Bremer-Bennett assumed the U.S. director position after the retirement of Andrew Ryskamp on June 30, 2015.

Bremer-Bennett’s extensive experience in Christian ministry includes more than 20 years of organizational leadership, leadership development, and administration in a variety of teaching, principal, superintendent, and director positions in the Rehoboth, New Mexico, Christian schools. Her professional activities also include engagements with the Van Lunen Center for Executive Management in Christian Schools, Gates Millennium Scholarships, and the Ford Foundation.

World Renew DRS Response in Washington, North Carolina

In April 2014, two tornadoes hit North Carolina, leaving a 15-mile swath of destruction that affected nearly 200 homes. The second tornado hit the town of Washington, North Carolina, as an EF-2 level storm, causing extensive damage to many houses and mobile homes there. Thankfully, no one was hurt or killed.

To help homeowners begin to recover from this devastating disaster, World Renew DRS is making plans to open a “mini-site” in Washington at the end of October that will operate through mid-December 2015. The mini-site is a new effort for DRS, and plans are to schedule only two-week volunteer assignments there. One change that you will encounter as a volunteer on this mini-site is that you will be able to your submit travel expenses for reimbursement as you would on a three-week assignment. If you are interested in volunteering in North Carolina this fall, contact Becky to arrange your assignment!



Recurring Donations to World Renew DRS

Please consider making a recurring monthly donation to World Renew DRS to support this great ministry! Your gift to *DRS-Greatest Need* supports responses to lesser-known, but just as devastating, disasters across North America. Click on *Donate Now* at worldrenew.net/drs to set up your month gift, or simply call 800-552-7972.

World Renew Around the World



Monsoon Season Furthers Shelter Crisis in Nepal

Many families started living outside after two catastrophic earthquakes hit Nepal earlier this year. Some people were forced outside because their houses were destroyed and they had nowhere else to go. Others whose homes remained standing could not bear the thought of sleeping or living in a damaged building that they feared would come crashing down on them during an aftershock.

In July, experts estimated that 598,400 houses in Nepal were completely destroyed and 283,600 homes were severely damaged by these two earthquakes. Monsoon season occurs in June, July, and August in Nepal, when there are torrential downpours and harsh winds. Families that were without shelter because of the earthquake would be especially vulnerable to the elements during these months.

To help homeless families prepare for the monsoon season, World Renew provided 1,825 households with shelter kits to construct temporary dwellings. Each kit contained 16

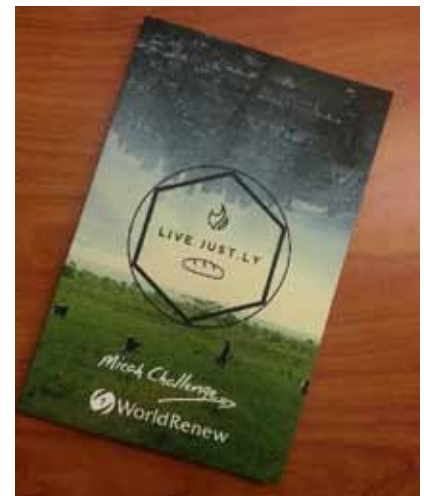
sheets of corrugated galvanized iron, a claw hammer, tie wire, and enough nails to erect a shelter that would, along with salvaged items, provide immediate protection from the elements until more permanent homes could be built.

In the months ahead, World Renew will continue to provide Nepalese families with the resources they need to construct permanent shelters. Some of the affected families will have the resources to rebuild their own homes, but many people are not financially capable. While World Renew has a lot of experience in earthquake-resistant shelter, it is consulting with various experts to design a permanent shelter that uses materials that are available locally and takes into account the sloping contours of the land in the area.

World Renew hopes to build 200 houses and is aiming to begin construction this fall, once the designs are finalized, the government permissions are secured, and the necessary staff is hired. To find out more and support this work, go to worldrenew.net/nepal.

New Biblical Justice Book for Small Groups

World Renew has a new resource for small groups that want to make “just” living a part of their everyday walk with God. *Live Justly* is a 10-session, in-depth scriptural and practical study to help people live justly in six key areas of life: advocacy, prayer, consumption, generosity, creation care, and relationships. It includes stories and thoughts from World Renew staff as well as brief essays from current biblical justice leaders like Nicholas Wolterstorff and Eugene Cho. It challenges each person to examine their attitudes and behaviors, evaluate policies that perpetuate injustice, and set a personal action plan.



The readings, discussions, and free online videos teach groups that change happens when we learn that biblical justice isn't always about doing something new — but rather about infusing what we already do with Kingdom values. For more information or to order, go to worldrenew.net/livejustly.



Save the Date! DRS Sunday 2016

Talk to your church about celebrating a DRS Sunday in 2016. March 6 is the suggested offering date, but if that does not work on your church schedule, you can celebrate DRS on ANY Sunday in 2016! We expect that a new DVD will be ready in November. Share this reminder with your pastor or deacons, and ask to schedule an offering during the showing of the DVD. Bulletin inserts, covers, and posters will also be available. All of these materials are FREE to order. Watch worldrenew.net/drs and your **DRS Opportunity Link** for more details!

Gift Catalog for Christmas



Have you looked over the World Renew Gift Catalog yet this year? DRS has included three giving options – and there are many more gifts to choose from around the world. Consider setting up a Giving Tree at your church, using ornaments of the items from the new gift catalog and our new **Giving Tree Project!** Visit worldrenewgifts.net to see the catalog online and find

more downloadable resources, or call 800-333-8300 to order your materials today.

If you would like to change how you receive this newsletter (email or postal mail), please let us know at the contact information below.



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