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If you have a story or poem  
about your volunteer experience  
that you'd like to share, please  
send it in to our office!

## Responding to a Stealth-Like Disaster: A New Reconstruction Site

"I talked with Sienna\*, a single mother with four young kids living in the Pensacola, Florida, area. A tree fell on their home during the storm, damaging the roof. The rain water just poured in. She didn't know how to treat the water damage and now her entire house is full of mold and mildew, and her kids are sick. She doesn't have the money to pay anyone to fix her home; she doesn't know what to do," said Richard Anema, a volunteer with World Renew's Disaster Response Services (DRS).

Sienna and her children are one of 300 families interviewed by World Renew DRS who are still suffering from the April 2014 flood. This flooding has been described as "stealth-like" in that it came very

quickly and had little nationwide coverage. The massive rains fell on relatively flat land and had nowhere to go, overwhelming drains, ditches, and ponds—essentially funneling water right into homes.

"The Florida panhandle was affected by four weather systems from April 7 through May 2, 2014, that produced historic rain fall, severe storms, tornadoes, and straight line winds. According to 30-year PRISM ([prism.oregonstate.edu](http://prism.oregonstate.edu)) data, rainfall exceeded norms by 200 to 600 percent. More than 25 inches of rain fell over a 36-hour period," said Andrea Krieger, president of the United Way of Escambia County in Pensacola. Five panhandle counties were declared national disaster areas.

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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 New Director

### **Greetings in the mighty name of Jesus Christ!**

Happy New Year! We hope it was a blessed Christmas for you and that good health and God's blessings are with you and your family this New Year. We greatly appreciate your continued support and prayers for World Renew Disaster Response Services and **Thank You** for all that you do to help those who are recovering from disasters.

On Sunday, March 1, 2015, we celebrate DRS Sunday! This is the 2015 offering date designated by the synod of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), but churches in many other denominations—Reformed, Presbyterian, United Reformed, and others—also participate in this giving opportunity. Talk to the leaders in your church about inviting members of your congregation to join with many other Christians in supporting the work of World Renew DRS through an offering on March 1 and showing the new DVD (available January 27 at [worldrenew.net/drs](http://worldrenew.net/drs)).

If March 1 does not work for you or your congregation, please find another Sunday in 2015 to celebrate World Renew DRS together!

The wonderful generosity of members of churches like yours goes a long way towards helping DRS meet its annual fundraising goals. A big part of the funds we raise comes from DRS Sunday offerings. Plus, DRS Sunday is a great way to involve your church in this ministry that you know and love. Please encourage your church by helping to plan and promote DRS Sunday and schedule an offering to support the work that DRS does in 2015. And of course, wear your green World Renew DRS shirt to church that day.

If you would like a speaker from World Renew to make a presentation at your church on DRS Sunday, please give us a call. We'd love to arrange a speaker for you. You will find free materials that create awareness for this offering at [worldrenew.net/drs](http://worldrenew.net/drs), including a bulletin cover, a bulletin insert, a poster, and our new DVD. There is also a PowerPoint presentation available if you would like to schedule an adult education time related to the offering. Let us know how we can help you.

*Each One Reach One* is the World Renew DRS theme for 2015. We ask that in the next 12 months, each of you share your enthusiasm for DRS and the work we do with one other person. Ask them to volunteer at one of our work sites, or better yet, invite them along with you on your next assignment. We need more volunteers, and if every one of our current volunteers recruits just one new person to DRS, we can double our efforts! Applications can be found on our website—or just call us and we will mail some to you.

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

Joyfully in Christ, for God is good!

Ron Willett, Director  
World Renew Disaster Response Services

P.S. Please use the donation envelope in this newsletter to support the work at our new site in Florida. Designate your gift for *Pensacola (FL) Flooding 2014*.

# Where We Worked in 2014

As we reflect on 2014, we are thankful for the grace of God who allowed us to respond to disasters in communities across the U.S. and Canada, helping families return home and sharing the love of Christ with them. Thank you to all of you who make this work possible.



Request your copy of the 2014 Annual Ministry Report, for the fiscal year 2013-2014, today to read about World Renew DRS justice work in High River, our efforts in needs assessments, and more. You can also view and download the report on line at [worldrenew.net/aboutus](http://worldrenew.net/aboutus). Look for it during the week of January 26, 2015.

- Earthquake
- Explosion
- Fire
- Flooding
- Hurricane
- Mudslide
- Storm
- Tornado



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“Sienna needs her roof repaired, the house gutted, and the mold removed. She is currently looking for a job and applying for disability. With upwards of \$33,000 in repairs and an income of less than \$10,000 a year, she does not know how she will recover without help,” Anema says.

But there is hope for Sienna and her neighbors because World Renew DRS is making a significant commitment to disaster survivors in Pensacola, Florida. On January 10, 2015, World Renew DRS opened a long-term reconstruction site to repair homes.

World Renew DRS has been active in the recovery efforts in Pensacola since shortly after the storms subsided. In June, World Renew DRS rapid response volunteers helped homeowners with sanitizing and clean up. In September, a needs assessment team conducted one-on-one interviews with 300 storm survivors to make sure that the needs of vulnerable people like Sienna would be addressed. World Renew DRS regional managers for the area, Eric and Nancy Johnson, spent countless hours working with the Be Ready Alliance Coordinating

for Emergencies (BRACE), the local recovery committee, to work out the details of operating a reconstruction site in Pensacola.

“The homeowners World Renew DRS is helping are the most vulnerable—the elderly, the disabled, those with medical issues, and single parent families,” says Eric Johnson. “Most of these homeowners have an annual income of less than \$20,000. Many also have no flood insurance because this area of Pensacola is not historically prone to flooding.”

The World Renew DRS agreement with BRACE reflects a true partnership that will help restore the homes of storm survivors to safety and security. According to the agreement BRACE will provide case management, materials, and the work permits needed for home repairs. World Renew DRS will provide self-contained teams of

### Meet Etta. Our rapid response team helped clean up her flooded Pensacola, Florida, home in June.

reconstruction volunteers, tool trailers, construction supervision, site management, and cooks. Habitat for Humanity is donating the use of four houses to provide accommodations for World Renew DRS volunteers who come from across North America to repair and rebuild homes.

The new reconstruction site in Pensacola will be a new addition to the World Renew DRS sites that are currently operating in: High River, Alberta; Washington, North Carolina; and Ocean County, New Jersey.

“Opening a site in Florida is unique compared to our Alberta and New Jersey sites in one regard. The historic flooding in Alberta and Super-storm Sandy in New Jersey were all over the news, and the need was very apparent,” says Ron Willett, World Renew DRS director. “The Florida flooding, however, was barely a blip on the national news, and it did not gain the attention that often raises the money we need to respond. It became clear after our needs assessment that our long-term help is desperately needed in this community. We have the funds and volunteers to operate for a short period of time, but require \$125,000 to properly fund a reconstruction site for a year. That is why we are asking for your financial support, involvement, and prayer to continue to help those affected by this stealth-like disaster.”

*\*Name changed for privacy.*

### 2013-2014 Quick Facts

Number of DRS volunteers: **2,916**

Number of hours donated: **247,486**

Number of households contacted for needs assessment: **16,477**

Number of homes rebuilt and repaired: **438**

Number of denominations represented by volunteers: **30**

## Across North America, DRS Volunteers Respond

### Reconstruction

Reconstruction work is currently taking place at a variety of sites in North America:

*Ocean County, New Jersey*, provides our volunteer teams with a regular supply of work. Project Managers Rich and Phyl Grevnstuk say that we will continue to have opportunities to serve disaster survivors in this location for a long time. After a short Christmas break, the site reopened in January. Thanks again to the volunteers who are giving their time in New Jersey in the dead of winter! It has been two years since Super-storm Sandy, and there are still many people in need.

Our site in *High River, Alberta*, closed temporarily in December and will reopen on February 14, 2015. During the downtime, our case managers are catching up with their work and the construction coordinator is preparing for the first work team that will arrive in February. Project Managers Henry and Linda Visscher continue to keep this a well-run site.

Our new site in *Pensacola, Florida*, opened on January 10, 2015 in response to severe April 2014 flooding. Last fall, we received a request from the director of the Be Ready Alliance Coordinating for Disasters (BRACE) asking us to consider opening a reconstruction site in Pensacola. Because World Renew DRS has experience with this director and organization, this was not a difficult decision. Don and Gert Vos were asked to take the project manager role, and together with Regional Managers, Eric and Nancy Johnson, started moving the project forward. A setup crew went to Florida in December to put in



**Resourceful as always! The cement shoot was not quite long enough to reach the bed . . . until someone remembered an old bathtub that had been taken out of the house before it was demolished. The tub was the perfect size for extending the cement shoot to the correct length to lay the cement.**



**World Renew DRS staff, volunteers, and friends join in a parting prayer with the set-up crew on its way to Pensacola, Fla.**

place the new site's household items, tool trailer, and vehicles. They also set up the volunteer's housing, prepared the kitchen and bedrooms, installed carpet, built a wall, and cleaned to prepare for the arrival of the first work team.

World Renew DRS received a request for volunteers to rebuild homes in *Washington, North Carolina*, from Tommy Gilbert of the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church (NCCUMC). The damage in Washington was caused by tornadoes in April 2014. The request was unique

in that volunteers would be housed in cabins in a dorm-like setting instead of in bedrooms that accommodate volunteer couples. Because we worked extensively with NCCUMC in the past, DRS considered the request and the flexibility it would require on the part of our married volunteers who serve together.

We always stress flexibility, but could we make it work? The volunteers certainly thought we could, and we soon had enough volunteers for four weeks. After the third week, DRS was asked to continue after the New Year through the end of March. Gilbert knew he could assign the work to DRS teams and then basically not worry: the work would get done and done well. Soon, Project Managers Rick and Bonnie Wiersma were overseeing a full crew of volunteers, and we have agreed to continue to work in Washington through March 28, 2015.

### Needs Assessment

Two weeks before U.S. Thanksgiving, Herm and Joan Fransen led a one-week assessment team on the eastern side of the Wenatchee National Forest in Okanogan and Douglas counties in Washington State. Please continue to pray for these communities.

### Regional Managers

We want to thank our regional project managers for their work in their regions, as they continue to partner with long-term recovery groups, attend meetings, participate in training events, assist other RPMs, and perform the other responsibilities their role entails.



## Appreciating New and Returning Group Mission Teams



We are thankful that over the last year 142 groups consisting of nearly 1,600 volunteers served in two dozen locations in the U.S. and Canada. We especially appreciate the new groups that joined us: approximately 40% of last year's groups were engaged with us for the first time.

We're also thankful, of course, for the groups that commit their time and talents over and over! It's gratifying that so many groups have trusted World Renew DRS to arrange a meaningful and memorable experience for them and sense God calling them to continue serving with us.

The groups program began shortly after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. A number of teams have served with us every year since then and in some cases more than once a year.

Our groups are also growing more diverse in several ways.

- More than 20% of our groups last year were from the Reformed Church in America.

- Over a dozen other denominations, colleges, and Christian organizations were represented.
- One group consisted of a grandpa with five of his teenaged grandkids.
- Businesses and organizations are implementing employee volunteer programs that allow employees to take time off with pay to volunteer in their own communities or others.

World Renew DRS has been particularly active in Rock Valley, Iowa, since a severe flood in June 2014. Early response coordinators were on the job there a few days afterwards and were followed by rapid response teams who provided cleanup and needs assessment volunteers followed a few months later. A World Renew DRS construction supervisor who lives in the area is serving as reconstruction coordinator, and in the last few months, individuals, couples, and groups from Michigan, Florida, Minnesota, Manitoba, and several communities in Iowa have gone to Rock Valley as volunteers. The Rock Valley community has been extremely hospitable and appreciative—particularly those who were able to get back in their homes for Christmas!

You can read the rest of this excellent example of World Renew's development work in Asia at [worldrenew.net/our-stories/respect-results-self-reliance](http://worldrenew.net/our-stories/respect-results-self-reliance). To learn more about World Renew around the world and get involved, visit [worldrenew.net](http://worldrenew.net) or financially support World Renew's international development programs at [worldrenew.net/donate](http://worldrenew.net/donate).

## World Renew Around the World

DRS is one part of World Renew's ministry with people who live in poverty and hunger around the world. *World Renew Around the World* is an opportunity for DRS volunteers to become more familiar with World Renew's work in international community development and justice education.

### Respect Results in Self-Reliance

by Tom Post

What is really at the heart of World Renew's calling to show compassion to the poor? Respect and addressing the root causes of poverty are two of the key motivations.

World Renew makes every effort to work respectfully across cultures, races, and religious ways of life—because God's image is present in all of humanity. One of the ways this respect becomes visible is in working with partnering organizations in communities around the world to create a shared vision and a shared set of values.

At the community level, respect manifests itself in requiring self-reliance. The importance of self-reliance is biblically based: Elisha's question to the poor widow who faced starvation was, "What do you have in your house?" Jesus' question to his disciples who faced a crowd of hungry people was, "What do you have to give them?"



## Volunteers in Tweed



Don't worry. We aren't trading in our green shirts for tweed jackets, and we didn't make anyone wear a tweed suit to build a house or on a needs assessment! We had volunteers working in Tweed, Ontario, in November and December 2014. Now the phrase "home for Christmas" has new meaning this year for Dorothy Rice. The 74-year-old widow was homeless after a flood on the Moira River severely damaged her cottage in April 2014. But thanks to World Renew volunteer labor, and local support, Dorothy moved back in to her rebuilt home just before Christmas.

"World Renew DRS volunteers took part in flood relief work in Belleville and Tweed last May," explained DRS Project Manager Tony DeWeerd. "When we went to work on Dorothy's home, we became aware that it was very badly damaged and located on a flood plain. It was the most serious situation we ran into. The owner is a widow and uses a wheelchair. Clearly, this woman needed a new home."

To raise the funds needed to complete the rebuild, World Renew staff approached local service clubs but found little help. However, the project moved forward quickly when

Andy Geertsma, a member of nearby Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Belleville, and owner of Geertsma Homes Ltd., volunteered his expertise. With volunteer labor, donated materials, and cooperation from the homebuilder's sub-trades (Mennonite Disaster Services and Samaritan's Purse), it was determined that the new home could be built for a low enough cost that Rice would be able to borrow against her deed to the land.

The new home, now complete, is on a concrete slab with walls that are a full 12 inches above the 100-year flood level. The house plans included a ramp to allow wheelchair access. Volunteers came from congregations in Kingston, Belleville, Bowmanville, and Peterborough, Ontario. "We had a father-daughter team from Peterborough helping to shingle the roof one week," said Tony DeWeerd. "We closed in the structure just as cold weather set in, and handed Dorothy the front door keys before Christmas."

Updated from [www.thebanner.org/news/2014/11/world-renew-helps-widow-return-to-her-home](http://www.thebanner.org/news/2014/11/world-renew-helps-widow-return-to-her-home), by Ron Rupke.

## Leave a Legacy

You have demonstrated your support for World Renew DRS's ministry through your faithful prayers, volunteer service, and monetary gifts during your lifetime. A legacy gift to World Renew DRS in your will or estate plan demonstrates your passion for this ministry even after your death. Those who indicate a gift to World Renew in their estate plan can join World Renew's Joseph Stewards group and receive exclusive information about World Renew throughout the year.

To assist you with planning, World Renew is a member of Christian Stewardship Services (Canada) and the Barnabas Foundation (US). These organizations can provide you with free, confidential advice. For more information, visit [worldrenew.net/josephstewards](http://worldrenew.net/josephstewards). Or contact Bob Laarman (US) at 800-552-7972 or Judy Eising (Canada) at 800-730-3490.



## In Memory Of

We recognize the following volunteers that entered into heaven in 2014.

Ellis Wykstra  
John VanLopik  
Ethel Schierbeek  
Virgil Baker  
David Coull  
Marian Barber  
Marion Vos  
Roger Langeland  
Bill Wolbert

If you know of a World Renew DRS volunteer who passed away in 2014 that is not on this list, please let us know so we can recognize them in an upcoming issue of the Spotlight.



## DRS Sunday 2015

March 1, 2015

On March 1, 2015, we celebrate DRS Sunday. This is an opportunity to involve your church in the ministry you know and love.

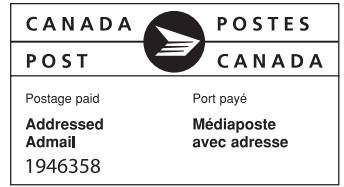
Church offerings are crucial to sustaining World Renew's ministry. Whether you are from the US or Canada, attend a Christian Reformed, Reformed, Presbyterian, Methodist, or Catholic church—or any of the 30 denominations represented by our volunteers—please celebrate with your church and support World Renew DRS in 2015. Take an offering and use the new, FREE materials (DVD, bulletin inserts and covers, and poster) that will be available to order January 27, 2015. Then be sure to wear your green shirts on DRS Sunday!

If you are not at your home church on March 1, or if it doesn't work for your church's schedule, DRS Sunday can be celebrated ANY Sunday of the year.



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