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TSU’s Hurricane Relief Effort

Texas Southern University has reason to be proud. Even though the University was in the midst of its own major cleanup from the devastation of Hurricane Ike, when asked, it readily accepted the task of becoming a POD (Point of Distribution) for FEMA. Six trailers, filled with water, ice and MRE’s rolled onto the campus on Monday – within hours, thousands of individuals and families lined the streets surrounding TSU seeking relief; water, ice, food, and resources of every kind.

TSU provided service to more than 12,000 individuals over a two day period. Visitors from every political and community entity, from near and far, came to the campus to observe the operation and to volunteer. TSU campus organizations, other universities, community organizations, church groups and grass roots organizations helped in the relief effort. But TSU’s heroes of the effort were the members of the Men’s Basketball team, who sprung into action, before help arrived on that first day, and for three days, unloaded boxes and distributed needed supplies to the throngs of residents that anxiously began lining up three hours before the POD opened.

Terrence Fountaine, with the City of Houston’s mayor’s office immediately contacted Dr. Rudley to ask that TSU be a pod site. James Rodriguez, City Council member, commented that, “TSU has been tremendous in this endeavor, and I’ve been bragging everyday about it.” He said TSU is in his district and that he’s never been more proud.

When asked to extend the operation a second day, Dr. Rudley, with no hesitation, answered, “Yes.” So the trucks, volunteers and the community went into motion early.
Another volunteer, Tomaro Bell, chairman of Super Neighborhood #83, stated—“...and they said there’s little or no hope for the youth of tomorrow. – I’m thrilled and encouraged about what I’ve seen. TSU’s Basketball Team members were humbled, took ownership and were helpful.”

I certainly cannot think of another opportunity that would allow us to show our passion for the community. I saw people come together; helping the elderly, children, and the overall community.”

“It is unusual to see this,” said TSU President Dr. John Rudley, who has been on the scene since day one. “People are usually impatient during trying times like this. What I’ve seen is, “a need to help others” come out.

Congressman Al Green was one of the first to arrive on the scene – talking with TSU students whose dormitories did not have power on Monday and who were moved into one of the University’s administrative buildings for a short time. Visits from many other community leaders as Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, Senator Rodney Ellis, Pastors Joel and Victoria Olsteen, Algenita Scott Davis, City Council Member Peter Brown, Chris Bell, FEMA representatives, were witnessed throughout the week.

I think that what we’re seeing is a NEW NORMAL, where people are helping people because it’s the right thing to do. An employee who worked the POD for a full day, at the end of that day, reflected saying, “Wow that was so gratifying.”

The POD rolls out and TSU’s faculty and staff turned their attention to the work needed on campus - continuing to help assess damages and working around the clock to restore the campus to a sense of normalcy.

Eva Pickens is the Director of Communications at Texas Southern University.