

After the storm



— Photo by Gayle Nelson

“We know South Mississippi.” So read the slogan on the back of the Wesley Medical Center t-shirts worn by Troy University senior nursing students.

The south Mississippi these students encountered was not the one workers at the Hattiesburg hospital had in mind when they coined that tag line.

The 12 students’ south Mississippi experience was one of 12- to 18-hour shifts, sleeping bags on hard floors, short naps and even shorter showers. And, trauma.

“A lot of trauma,” Kerry Varner recalls of the group’s trip to assist the medical center’s staff face the health needs following Hurricane Katrina.

The students lobbied to make the

trip after seeing the devastation. They learned on the afternoon of Aug. 31 that the trip was on and left for the 211-bed Hattiesburg hospital the following morning.

“The nurses at Wesley were just so exhausted and you could see the relief in their faces when they saw us arriving,” Varner said.

What made the students’ presence even more important to the staff at Wesley was the influx of patients received from Hattiesburg’s other hospital – Forest General Hospital. The larger hospital had experienced generator problems and was forced to ship many patients to nearby Wesley.

“With a lot of the patients we saw, we had to deal with the psychological

and well as the physical aspect of the situation,” said Varner.

The students, who returned to Troy, AL, on Labor Day, also were in agreement that they would go back if the opportunity presented itself.

“This was the chance of a lifetime,” said Tammy Kilgore. “We weren’t really sure what to expect, but I know that it will be an experience that we will remember all of our lives.”

While the nursing students were lending a helping hand in south Mississippi, another group of TROY students and employees were reaching out a little closer to home.

When Hurricane Katrina displaced Barry Lemoine, his wife Shannon and his mother-in-law Karen Gildea, the family wound up in Troy. Lemoine remembered the Trojans’ trip to Baton Rouge last football season to tangle with the LSU Tigers and headed for TROY.

Lemoine then put his computer to work for him. The playwright sent an e-mail to Troy University explaining his family’s plight and seeking assistance.

Lemoine’s e-mail went to Dr. Cameron Martindale, senior vice chancellor for advancement and external relations. Touched by the family’s situation, Martindale immediately went to work.

TROY employees were able to locate a house for the family and donations were collected to help cover the rent. Some 41 students, faculty and staff worked to clean and paint the house and supplied the family with some basic necessities.



At top, this Pascagoula, MS, home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina as the strong Category 4 storm roared ashore. Above, international students joined other members of the student body, faculty and staff in cleaning and painting home for the displaced Lemoine family. At right, senior nursing students and members of the nursing faculty worked at a Hattiesburg, MS, hospital following Hurricane Katrina.

