

Army Corps volunteers leave home to provide one for others: Hurricane Harvey Housing Mission

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Special to The Vidorian

After Hurricane Harvey devastated Texas last summer, Robert Greco, an engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District was driving around Houston, Texas.

"I passed by a ranch style house. Its door was wide open and the lights were on and I can see right in," said Greco.

"The family living there had cut a foot of sheet rock from the floor board up. They must have been flooded and had water damage and did this to get rid of mold growth around the walls. I guess they had no place to live and they were staying there," he said.

Greco said that this is the very reason why he was there. He deployed there to provide temporary housing for families like this, whose homes were damaged from the hurricane.

Greco is currently part of a team of Army Corps volunteers who have deployed, sometimes several times, to Texas as part of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Hurricane Harvey Housing Mission.

The southeast portion of Texas, along the Gulf of Mexico, was battered by Hurricane Harvey, a Category 4 storm. The area experienced 130 mph winds and was drenched with over 5 feet of rain.

This resulted in widespread, catastrophic flooding that damaged nearly 300,000 homes and sent nearly 780,000 residents looking for shelter.

Harvey has been characterized as a 1,000 year flood event, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Just as big as the hurricane's impact was the size of the disaster response, which was the largest in the state's history.

Volunteers from different agencies also traveled to Texas to assist



Courtesy photo/Staff Sgt. Daniel J. Martinez, Air National Guard/
Flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey in Southeast Texas.

FEMA. This included almost 1,000 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers personnel. The Army Corps assisted in providing temporary housing for displaced people.

"When it comes to doing this, FEMA considers several alternatives," said Randall Hintz, Chief, Operations Support Branch, New York District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who deployed twice to Texas to serve as an Action Officer and liaison to FEMA.

The alternatives include giving residents money to fix their homes in order to make them livable, placing trailers on resident properties for them to use while they are fixing their homes and putting people in hotels or rental apartments.

Hintz said that in many cases, the Army Corps volunteers are staying in many of the same hotels as displaced people so they see firsthand the hardship faced by families during this time.

Hintz said that after FEMA has exhausted these alternatives, its last resort is to build mobile home parks or refurbish or expand existing mobile home parks. This is what the Army Corps assisted FEMA with.

Greco served as a Mission Manager and was responsible for locating large parcels of land that could potentially be used to set up new mobile home parks.

Greco has deployed to

other FEMA missions including taking part in the recovery efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2006 in New Orleans and deploying to the New Jersey Emergency Operation Center for Hurricane Irene in 2011.

To locate open parcels of land, Greco in coordination with Action Officers performed research on a navigation computer program and then traveled over 5,000 miles throughout southeast, Texas to look at the sites.

He passed by cattle ranchers and oil rigs as he traveled throughout Austin, Galveston Island and Houston.

At the potential sites, Greco looked for specific things including nearby utilities, water hydrants, sewer manholes and road drainage.

He said that these locations need to meet certain criteria. "These sites must be in commuting distance from the impacted communities, be near schools and hospitals, must not be in a flood zone, and must have approximately 20 acres of property to house 100 mobile homes," said Greco.

Three hundred and sixty potential sites were identified and were reviewed by the State.

He said, "Creating a mobile home park includes creating the plans and specs for the housing pads that the mobile homes will be placed on, building the roadway system, setting

up mail boxes, installing the plumbing and sewer systems, and the utilities in coordination with utility companies."

In addition, for each mobile home they provide an external fire suppression unit. This is a pressurized water heater that sits outside the mobile home. If there is a fire, it rapidly sends a high volume of water into the home to take it out.

Greco said, "After all of this is done, all FEMA has to do then is bring in the mobile homes on trailers, place them on the pads and hook them up to the utilities."

The size of each mobile home is 14 by 64 feet and each acre of land holds five homes.

Another way the Army Corps created temporary housing is by refurbishing or expanding existing mobile home parks.

The Army Corps traveled to potential sites and were welcomed by the citizens. "They saw us wearing our shirts with the Army Corps logo and opened up to us about how impacted they were from the hurricane," said Jessica Fischer, Project Manager, New York District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District, who deployed to Texas to serve as a Mission Manager.

"The work that we do will impact these families. I can't think of anything more important than being able to help people have a safe and healthy place to



Courtesy photo/Randall Hintz, Chief, Operations Support Branch, New York District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

All hands meeting at the FEMA Joint Field Office in Austin, TX where the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies gathered to discuss the Hurricane Harvey Housing Mission.

live," said Fischer who has deployed for other FEMA housing missions for Hurricanes Sandy, Irene and Lee.

These parks must meet the same criteria as building a new park. Refurbishing them includes cleaning the park land of any hurricane damage, removing old mobile homes, setting up new housing pads and placing new mobile homes on them, building fencing, placing gravel and making improvements to the utilities, storm drains and sewage.

There are advantages to refurbishing existing mobile home parks as oppose to building new ones said Peter Kuglstatler, Engineer, New York District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who deployed to Texas to serve as an Action Officer.

"The benefits of rebuilding an existing mobile home park include the utilities are already ready to go, the necessary permits have already been done and if it's close to the communities in need - it's a win win," said Kuglstatler who has deployed for other FEMA missions, including taking part in the recovery efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Mathew in North Carolina last year.

One of these refurbished mobile home parks is Oak Homes Park in Vidor, Texas.

Hintz who assisted in the refurbishing this mobile home park said,

"As I was leaving to return to the east, FEMA was in the process of rolling in the mobile homes into Oak Homes Park for twenty-one families in need."

Working on missions like this means working around-the-clock operations, seven days a week under sometimes difficult circumstances, but Army Corps personnel continue to do it again and again.

Hintz explains why he volunteers. He attended daily mission progress meetings where there were always a lot of balls in the air, things going on. After these meetings he would visit the Call Center that's in touch with hurricane survivors. Every day, he would look at a folder on a desk in the center. The folder holds a list of the people still living in cars.

"This is what grounded me every day," said Hintz. "We are getting people out from sleeping in their cars to some form of reasonable living."

He added, "I didn't want to be someone in that folder and I couldn't imagine my family living in a car, but they were out there. You always remember that even though we are pushing paper, our paper affects somebody's life."

Dr. JoAnne Castagna is a Public Affairs Specialist and Writer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District. She can be reached at joanne.castagna@usace.army.mil

Worship & Praise

BRING YOUR FAMILY TO REAFFIRM YOUR FAITH AT THE HOUSE OF WORSHIP OF YOUR CHOICE THIS SUNDAY.

<p style="text-align: center;">Rose City Baptist Church 783-0188 1430 Old Hwy 90 Rose City</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Worship 11:00 a.m. & 6:00 p.m. Wednesday Night: 6:30 p.m. Pastor: Tony Wilcoxson</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Harmony Baptist Church 4685 Hwy 12, Vidor</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Sunday School: 9:45 a.m. Sunday Worship: 11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Wednesday night: 6:00 p.m. "Bringing God glory by developing disciples who love God, love people, and serve others" Pastor Doug Bray www.harmonybaptistvidor.com</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Pine Forest Baptist Church The Place Where Love Meets 4800 N. Main, Vidor</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Sunday Bible Study: 9:45 a.m. Worship: 10:50 a.m., 6:30 p.m. Wednesday Prayer: 6:00 p.m. Worship Service Mon., Wed., Fri., Sat. & Sun. 9:00am Channel 1309 Time Warner Cable TV Pastor — Dr. Stephen Dolar www.pineforestbaptist.org pfbc@gtbtzclass.com</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Faith Baptist Church 490 Grand • 769-2303</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Sunday School 9:00 a.m. Worship: 10:15 a.m. Wednesday Bible Study 6:30 p.m. AWANA Bible Clubs 6:30-8:00 p.m. Sundays Evening Service 1st & 5th Sundays 6:00 p.m. Pastor — Joe Reed</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Eastgate United Pentecostal Church Exit 861 - East & West Bound Located on south side of Fwy 769-6437</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Sunday: Sunday School 10:00 a.m. Evangelist Service 5:00 p.m. Wednesday Bible Study: 7:30 p.m. Youth Activities 7:30 p.m. Rev. Matthew Tuttle www.eastgateupc.org</p>	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 1.2em;">Vidor Church of Christ</p> <p>460 East Freeway 769-3592</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Sunday: Bible Class 9:00 a.m. Worship 10:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m. Wednesday: 7:00 p.m. *Preacher Jim Nash Missionary Gage Coldwater *</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH VIDOR 350 North Main • 769-2418 Following Jesus. Finding New Life.</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">LIFE Groups: 9:15 a.m. Sunday Worship: 10:30 a.m. Sunday Evening: 6:00 p.m. Terry L. Wright, Pastor Web Site: http://www.fbcvidor.org E-Mail: terry@fbcvidor.org</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Christ's Community Church Hwy. 105 681-9408</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Sunday School: 9:30 am Sunday Service: 10:30 am "Bible Teaching, Jesus Loves You"</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">LIGHTHOUSE Baptist Church 1055 Jay Drive Rose City Dave Parks, Pastor 284-0147</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Open Mic Southern Gospel Music meets Third Friday Evening each month 6:30 pm Sunday School 10 am Worship 11 am YOU'RE INVITED!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church 1600 N. Main • 769-2865 www.catholiccomehome.org</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">MASS: Saturday 5:00 p.m. Vigil Mass Sunday 10:00 a.m. Novus Ordo Mass 11:30 a.m. Latin Mass HOLY DAY MASSES: 8 a.m. & 7 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">New Hope Community Church of God 21688 IH-10 • Vidor, TX</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Sunday Services at 11:00 am & 6:00 pm Wednesday Night at 6:30 pm (409) 284-7929 Pastor Rev. Bob Austin</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">TurningPoint SUNDAYS 9:15 & 11 AM</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">TPCOV.ORG 409-769-8818 3600 NORTH MAIN • VIDOR</p> <p style="font-size: 0.7em;">WE ARE A DISRUPTIVE FORCE OF GRACE REDIRECTING LIVES INTO AN UNDENIABLE IDENTITY IN CHRIST</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Maplecrest Baptist Church Vidor • 769-3567</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">SUNDAY SCHOOL AT 9:30 SUNDAY SERVICE AT 10:45 SERVICES HELD IN CHURCH GYM "Passion for God + Love for People" Pastor: David Valleau</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">First Church of the Nazarene 370 N. DeWitt Rd. Church 769-6653</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Sunday School 9:45 a.m. Morning Worship 10:45 a.m. Bible Study Sunday: 6:00 p.m. Wednesday: 7:00 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">A Family that Prays Together Stays Together!</p>	<div style="text-align: center;"> </div>