



COLBY
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Preparedness is key to Red Cross mission

By **Patty Decker**
Free Press Editor

The Thomas County Red Cross Chapter has made progress both at home and in volunteering to assist Hurricane Katrina victims in recent weeks, said Molly Oliver, disaster chair.

Following the devastating blow to the south, the local chapter sent out a plea in late August, she said, with 40 people inquiring and 12 individuals actually taking the fast track courses in training as volunteers.

"With Hurricane Katrina," Oliver said, "it proved to me again that individuals, communities and family preparedness is the real key in preparing for disasters."

Oliver said there were some in Thomas County who weren't even aware the Red Cross had a chapter here.

Along with making progress in training more people to deploy to other areas in distress, Oliver said, the county too is gaining volunteers in the event of natural disasters that could occur right here in northwest Kansas.

In addition to training the 12 new volunteers for assignments in the south, Oliver said that the recruits with not from Thomas County exclusively.

"We had people training from St. Francis, Herndon, and Selden, which not only strengthens us here but is reaching out to more isolated and remote areas as well," she said.

For Oliver, there is still a lot of

work that needs to be done.

"We need to train and educate as many as we can to be prepared. It doesn't matter if it's a national disaster or not."

Anyone who can sit on the Thomas County Red Cross board of directors, serve on a committee, volunteer time in the local office, or serve in some small capacity is essential to the continued survival of the group, Oliver said.

"Because we are small and serve so much of northwest Kansas," she said.

"We must strive to keep partnerships with other outlying communities — even if someone can only answer the telephone three hours a week, or help in any of a multitude of ways. We are only as strong as the people who give," she said.

For Oliver and the staff at the Red Cross, the contributions by Colby, Thomas County and other areas have been a series of "mini-miracles."

For example, two major drives were organized to get food, clothing, money and more to the families who have lost everything; area churches are sending aid; schools, organizations and individuals have done their part.

In addition to the thousands of dollars in donations and contributed items gathered by northwest Kansas residents to ease the pain of those suffering in the south, there are still others standing ready to do something.

This week, Oliver said she visited

Golden Plains High School and spoke to a full assembly of students who asked what they could do.

"These students asked me questions about how the Red Cross works, where do donations go, what is happening with victims affected by Hurricane Katrina, and what they can do as a school," she said.

Oliver said she made suggestions to them about adopting a high school in that area sending spirit letters or requesting that their donations be specifically earmarked for refurbishing a school and more.

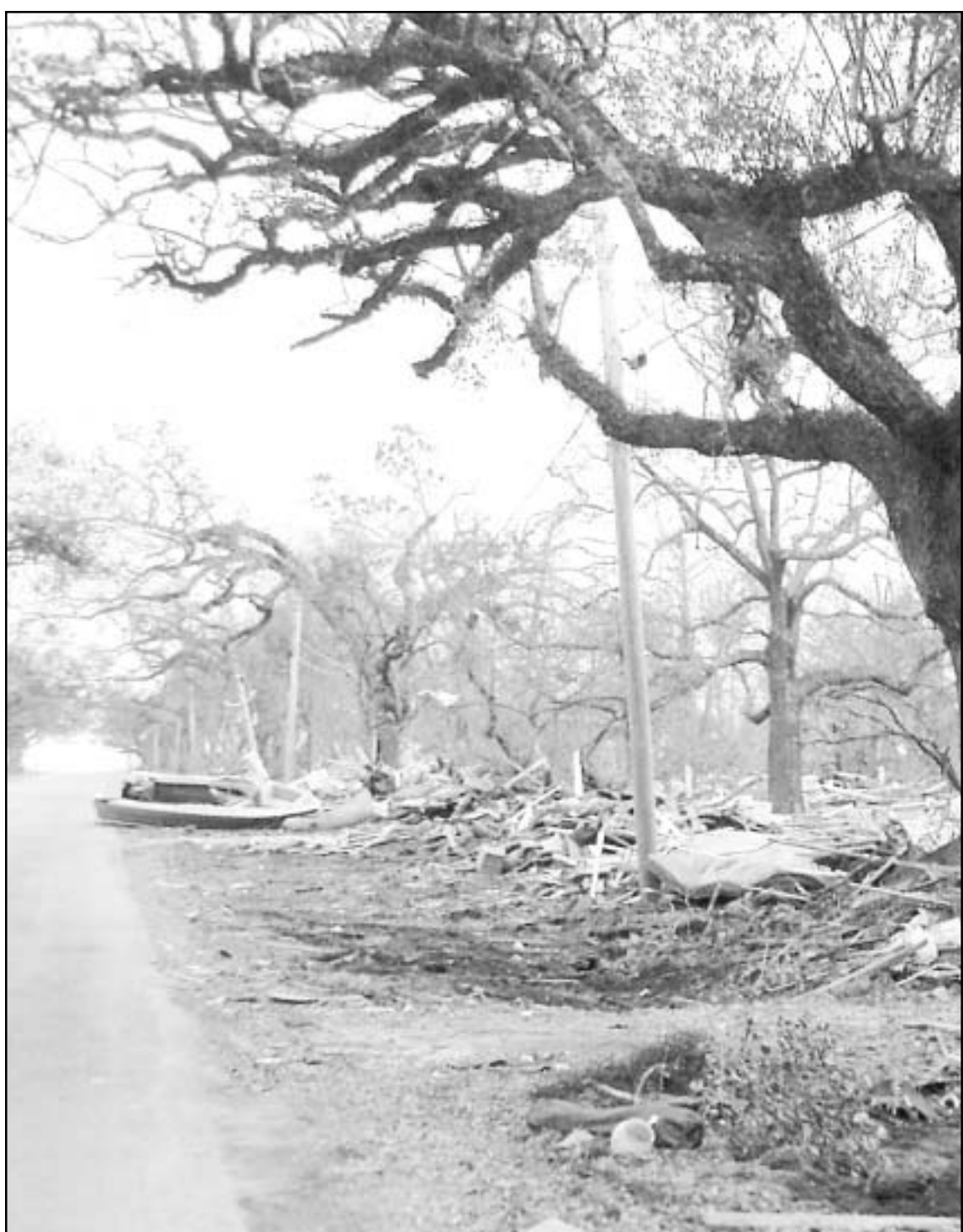
"I encouraged them to consider taking training in CPR and first aid at their own school — noting that preparedness is so important," she said.

Another way employers have helped the recent trainees, she said, was that some agreed to letting their employees train with some providing leave time to go to the disaster areas.

"So many people are walking out of their lives to help others," she said.

In recent weeks, her husband, Jim, along with Frank Powers of Gove County spent time in Waveland, Miss. and returned earlier this week. Another Colbyite, Ken Frahm, has also volunteered to assist victims of the hurricane and is expected back next week.

For questions or how to help, call the Red Cross office at 462-7161 or stop by their facility, 350 S. Range. Oliver can be reached at (785) 460-7653 or (785) 462-6133.



HOLLY YOUNG/Colby Free Press

Alone boat on one of the coastal highways near Waveland tells the story. Debris, mud and wreckage were common sights for Jim Oliver and Frank Powers, Red Cross volunteers.

Colby man talks about Hurricane Katrina experience

By **Patty Decker**
Free Press Editor

The first of two volunteers from the Colby area recently returned from working with the Red Cross in Mississippi.

Jim Oliver, Colby, and Frank Powers, Gove County, served as volunteers on the county's emergency response vehicle at Waveland where victims there didn't evacuate.

"This was bigger than anything I had ever experienced with the Red Cross thus far," Jim said about the assignment.

"The filth, sludge, the unsanitary conditions, the death and destruction was everywhere," he said.

Oliver said Waveland was about

25 miles from Gulf Port, which is a small town of about 2,000 people and right on the coast.

"These were people who made the decision to stay and ride out the storm," he said.

Most of them, Jim said, believe now it was a bad decision to stay, but many told him they had no gasoline, no car, or thought they would be alright if they moved to the second floor of their home or into attics.

"Everybody had a story to tell," he said, "but all of them agreed that if they could have done it over again, none would have made the decision to stay."

He said that many of the news broadcasts about the people cutting holes in the roof to get out of attics

came from the area he and Powers were serving.

The first half mile of the coastline, Jim said, had been reduced to sticks where once stood resort homes along the beaches.

The chaos and commotion in that particular area was also heart-wrenching, he said. Although there were traffic signals, none of them were working and law enforcement command centers were being set up when Jim and Powers began their work.

"The chaos included looting, dogs run over in the streets, people pushing grocery carts around with personnel possessions in them, a parking lot turned into a hospital with surgeries being done under a

tent and a huge search and rescue operation was underway with a temporary morgue," he said.

"So many things were eerie and I felt terrible, because typically we don't deal with things of this nature as volunteers with the Red Cross," he said.

The routine day for Jim and Frank started in Wiggina at 6:30 a.m. and generally would end at 9 or 10 p.m. Each morning they would load the vehicle with about 250 hot meals, snacks and juices and drive the 55 miles to Waveland.

After distributing the 250 morning meals, they would return to Wiggina and load up the 250 afternoon meals and drive back to Waveland.

Once the people realized that the emergency response vehicle was bringing hot meals to the various neighborhoods, it went smooth and they really got the job done.

"I felt bad for these people," Jim said, "they had been through the flood and there would be more heartache to follow."

After serving 500 meals a day (morning and afternoon), the two would return to Wiggina where they stayed in a school gymnasium on cots.

When compared to the victims in Waveland, Jim said life in the gymnasium wasn't so bad — they could shower, had two or three fans set up and an air mattress to sleep on.

After returning home late last

week, Jim said he didn't realize how much internalizing he had done about the situation and how the experience had taken its toll on his heart.

Currently the doctors are attempting to bring the heart rhythm back to normal on its own.

Not wanting to dwell on his health situation, Jim did say that he hopes his heart will get back to normal on its own — but was unaware that the work, stress and emotional drain had caught up with him in this way.

"That's a tough one to admit," he said.

For now, Jim is doing alright and continues to pray for the victims as he watches from Colby now.

Tropical fun



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Colby High School students showed off their school spirit during "Tropical Thursday" today. Mark Bartlett, Jacquie Fry, John Schmidt, and Jessie Stephens were all dressed up for the day's theme. The school's student council chose a theme for each day during Homecoming week. Tonight there will be a jersey auction, bonfire and pep rally at 8:30 p.m. at the Thomas County Fairgrounds. The community is invited to come show their support for the Eagles.

After 13 years, Genesis continues helping families in Thomas County

By **Tisha Cox**
Colby Free Press

People in the county have been getting assistance from Genesis-Thomas County, Inc. for 13 years now. They were first organized in April, 1993.

Wynn Duffey, board president, said the organization has one main focus.

"It's mostly emergency food assistance," she said. "People can come once a month."

Duffey said they help families when they need it, from helping them through a rough patch to families who need assistance throughout the year.

To get assistance, she said people must have been Thomas County residents for at least three months.

Many families are referred to Genesis, and they can work with other service or church organizations in the county to get assistance where it is needed.

Or people can call the Genesis office at 460-7930 to refer someone. She said they have an answering machine that is checked several times during the week, so people can leave a message.

In 2005, an average of 49 families a month have been helped so far. Duffey said it's fluctuated, but they

have helped as many as 55 families in one month this year. She said the numbers are about the same as last year.

Also, the organization is supported solely on donations, both of money and non-perishable food items.

Duffey said many churches and service organizations collect food and donate it.

Others hold food drives throughout the year to help, including Post Office employees who have an annual drive as well as Girls Scouts, whose drive will be coming up in mid-October.

"Those are both really big," she said.

Last year, employees at Citizens Medical Center held a week-long competition to see who could come up with the most donations.

Duffey said that's just an example of some of the things done around the county to help out.

She said if people want to help, they can donate food or money, of course, participate in a food drive or volunteer to fill food baskets.

The food bank is staffed by Retired and Senior Volunteer Program volunteers, all of whom are over 55. She said people can get involved that way if they fit those require-

ments. This holiday season, they will need volunteers in December to fill Christmas baskets. The board is also looking for one more member.

Duffey said they can always use non-perishable canned goods like soup, vegetables, fruit and canned meat like tuna.

They can also use peanut butter and jelly, Jell-o and pudding, cereal and boxed tuna or hamburger helper. She said they can't take anything that has already been opened or home-canned.

The applications for Christmas baskets will go out in mid-October and they will also be made available at several locations.

Churches or individuals can also refer families. They used to help with school supplies each year but she said other organizations provide much assistance with that, but they will if someone donates supplies.

"That's something else that we can do," Duffey said.

Genesis is at the Thomas County Office Complex, Suite 6.

They are open from 10 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. on Wednesdays.

To make a monetary donation, people can send them to Genesis, Box. 214, Colby, Kan. 67701.

