

The Log of the Guinston Gutters

Mission Trip 14

October 3-11, 2009

Our Mission #14 to New Orleans departed Guinston Church after a slight delay for assembly of our team of 10. The crew included Walter and Sue (“Smiley” and “Sunshine”) Blumenfeld, Patti (“Cowgirl”) Johnson, Wayne and Elizabeth (“Tony” and “Sleepy”) Deller, Donald (“Duck”) Ruff, Mae (“Maw”) Lewis, Bill (“Patootie”) Thompson, Rich (“Sparky”) Dohm, and Chuck (“Lobster”) Miller. Three additional volunteers dropped out due to Swine Flu and gainful employment. On this excursion, the entire team traveled by road.



We took our usual breakfast break at Ingram's Diner, and posed for pictures with the Giant Rooster. With a price tag of \$1,600.00 it's not likely to grace the Blumenfeld front yard anytime soon. Traveling weather sunny and breezy. We were passed by Humane Society animal rescue vehicles- a big rig and a van headed southbound, probably to the recently flooded areas in Georgia. In Chattanooga we were greeted at the Northminster Presbyterian Church by 2 new members (Tim & Beth Miller) who let us in and provided the team with supper.

Sunday we got on the road late (8AM) after breakfast at the Hungry House restaurant. Uneventful drive through Georgia became a bumpy and boring transit of Northern Alabama. We tried playing the Roadkill Game, but there were not enough identifiable carcasses to generate any points. Boredom was relieved in Birmingham by a near-miss at an accident cleanup site on I-59, then by beautiful wildflowers and blooming magnolias in the median strip. After lunch in Meridian, we rolled southbound through Mississippi to New Orleans and arrived at the Jefferson Presbyterian Church in late afternoon.

Monday morning we drove to our main construction job site in East New Orleans. This was a house owned by Lionel Corey, an oil rig mechanic who rose to the occasion after Hurricane Katrina and became a neighborhood leader. He organized the survivors in the blocks surrounding his to provide for their own food, drinking water, shelter and security from looters and gangs, and in doing so enabled the regrowth of a stable community. Before Katrina, he had made his two adjacent houses into a duplex by linking them with a garage and workshop; he lived in the larger, two-story house, and the smaller house was for his elderly mother. The storm surge had flooded the houses to a depth of 12 feet and the wind had damaged the roof. Both interiors had been gutted and were about midway in the process of reconstruction. Our work list for this house included flooring, interior trim, paint and finish work, exterior painting and roof repairs.



Tuesday morning we returned to the Corey house and continued with the needed work, with Tony taking the lead on flooring, Bill on trim work, Walter patching the roof, Patti reworking a staircase and the rest of the crew working as needed on flooring, drywall, painting, cabinetry and other finishing details. After lunch four volunteers were detailed to another work site for door frame repairs, replacement door installation, drywall mudding and materials trans-shipment. After a long day on the

job and a pleasant after-dinner visit by Paul, Sally and Andrew Davis, we secured the vehicles in the church parking lot and headed off to bed in a thoroughly worn-out condition.. That's when we were struck by *Murphy's Law, Corollary I **, and we discovered that the keys had been locked inside Tony's van. There were no local locksmiths available, but Chuck was able to snake a twisted coat-hanger wire inside the van door and pop it open.



On Wednesday we split the crew in halves. One group returned to the Corey house to continue with flooring and finishing details; the other group stayed at Jefferson Presbyterian Church to clear the pre-school building of excess furniture, relief work supplies and accumulated junk so that the pre-school could pass inspection under new Fire Code requirements. The flooring and finishing work at the Corey house had gone so well that by Wednesday afternoon we had nearly completed the construction plan goals for two weeks of their schedule.

Wednesday evening we were treated to dinner by the JPC congregation. After dinner Tony and Chuck decided to stroll along the Mississippi River levee and take some pictures. They encountered another walker who had just moved into a small apartment in the area. After talking for a while, he mentioned that he had not yet found a church to suit him and that he was worried about his two children running loose without guidance in New Orleans. So Chuck and Tony told him about our Katrina aid mission

** Murphy's Law, Corollary I: Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong, and it will most likely go wrong at an inconvenient time and place when you can't easily deal with it.*

story, Project Homecoming, and the Jefferson Presbyterian Church with its outreach programs and gave him directions to find it.

On Thursday we left four volunteers at JPC for the morning to help with sorting and bagging groceries for the food bank operation. It is noteworthy that this little congregation with minimal resources is still faithfully operating a food bank serving over 200 poor families and homeless individuals; this continues despite the destruction of the sanctuary building by lightning strike and fire, and a mostly elderly membership diminished by many dislocations after Katrina.



Thursday afternoon we sent another sub-crew of 4 volunteers to the Carol Jupiter house in the Lower Ninth Ward for appliance installation, security light hookup and electrical repairs which were needed before the formal dedication ceremony scheduled for Friday. It seems that the “licensed electrical contractor” (who had been hired by Project Homecoming to complete the wiring job abandoned by the original dishonest contractor) had also done an incomplete and shoddy job which required attention from the volunteers to correct multiple safety defects and provide working electricity throughout the house. We fixed the security lights and installed a dishwasher and refrigerator.

Thursday evening we were treated to a fish-fry at the Davis's home (“What Happens In The Garage, Stays In The Garage”) and their neighbors mercifully refrained from calling the police.

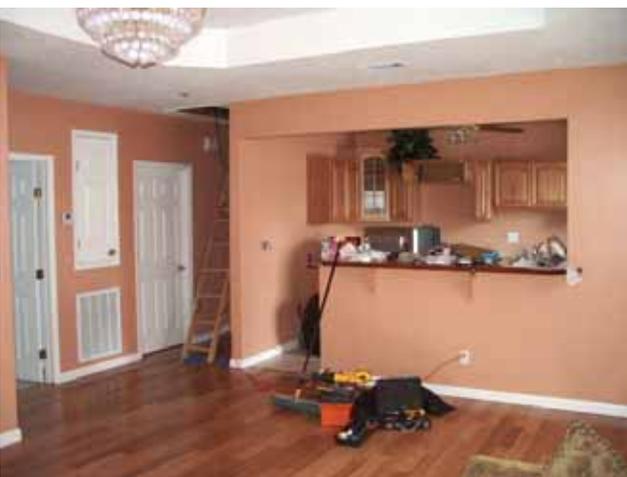




Friday morning we again split the crew between the two houses. In the Corey house we completed the flooring and trim, and finished with a major cleanup. On Monday, Lionel was camping in a chaotic construction zone; Friday we left it as a house where the upstairs bedroom and bathroom could be lived in comfortably while remodeling is completed.

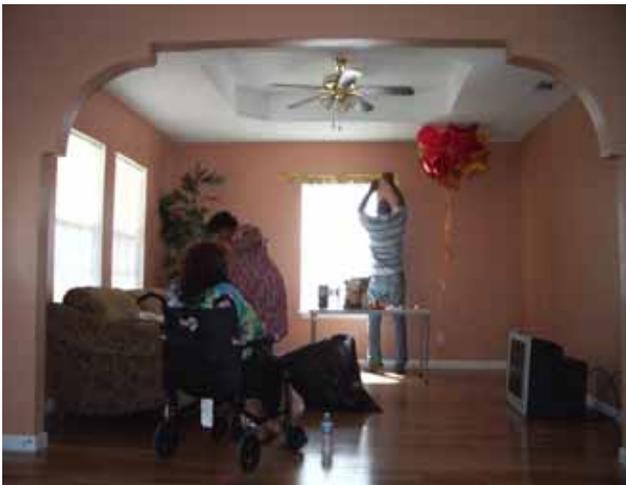


In the Jupiter house we installed a built-in microwave and washing machine, and rewired several non-functional electrical circuits from the breaker box to fixtures and receptacles.





We finished work on both job sites and attended the dedication ceremony and party for Carol Jupiter, then drove back to Jefferson PC for supper and packing.



Saturday morning we had a “start-stop-start-stop” departure from Jefferson PC, with a stop at Paul's house for ice, a fuel stop, a Maple Donuts interlude, and a diversion to the Corey house job site to retrieve forgotten tools – all before we left New Orleans. All went well until we stopped for lunch at our favorite Flying-J truck stop in Bessemer, Alabama, where we found that their restaurant had gone out of business. We drove patiently onward and found a replacement lunch destination: Charley's Restaurant at I-59 exit 134 north of Birmingham. Charley's served really good food- of course we were really hungry.

Saturday evening we stopped at the Presbyterian Church in Sweetwater, TN at the invitation of pastor Mike Chamberlain. Before bedtime we talked about the possibility of starting a volunteer mission program in the most poverty-stricken areas of the mountains as the Katrina recovery effort in New Orleans winds down.

Sunday morning we proceeded onward with a breakfast stop at Flapjack's, where Tony wandered into the Ladies' Room and emerged somewhat concerned that there was no urinal fixture on the wall.

In northern Virginia we encountered a massive traffic backup, and exited from I-81 just before total gridlock. After a relatively painless tour of the Shenandoah Valley on secondary roads, we got back on I-81 just past the scene of a massive truck wreck which had tied up traffic for miles in both directions. This was one of Walter's detours which actually worked. (usually these detours begin with the walkie-talkie call of “Follow me! I know what I'm doing!” and end up with long circular drives on unfamiliar roads, with someone else finally figuring out how to get back to our main route.) This was followed by a bubble-gum blowing contest between Sue and Annie.

The weather had turned cool and sunny, and we arrived in good order at Guinston Presbyterian Church with a collective sigh of relief. We put away our traveling grumpiness and thanked Our Lord for the successful conclusion of Mission Trip #15.