

SMC Students Spend Spring Break Rebuilding Big Easy

By Jennifer Wake

Spring break is often a time for students to relax and rejuvenate, but for the thousands of school-age children who lost everything to Hurricane Katrina, it's just another week or two spent trying to piece their lives back together. This spring break, seventeen Saint Mary's students decided to help.

drywall, baseboards, and trim, along with the toilet, plumbing, heating system, until only a skeleton of the building remained. Then they developed a demolition strategy. Attaching ropes to key points in the structure, they pulled the building to the ground.

"[The people at Catholic Charities] thought

the project]. Unfortunately, a lot of resources are drying up."

Although the living conditions are cramped and the work is hard, Anderson continues to be inundated with student requests to go back. She had to limit the Easter break trip to 17 students due to funding constraints – an unfortunate, yet



Photo by David R Blanchard

Setting out last Friday, the students joined Associate Dean of Liberal Arts Shawny Anderson on a trip to New Orleans where they will operate as a mobile relief unit to help rebuild some of what Katrina destroyed. It marks the fifth trip by Anderson and Saint Mary's students to the New Orleans area since the hurricane hit the Gulf Coast in August 2005.

During this trip, the students will stay in modified housing, much like a dormitory, which should feel quite luxurious following the cramped conditions they endured on a gutted Greyhound bus in January. They slept on a ring of boards which served as makeshift cots suspended above bench seats.

"There's no privacy, no alone time," said Saint Mary's student Justin Verrips about the bus. Verrips has made the trip four times before this one. "Within a few days, we're just a machine. It's hard to come back to civilization and kind of be apart. When we get back, we're at each other's hip for a week."

During the January trip, 25 students completed a total of more than 4,000 hours of labor in difficult conditions. It rained 15 of the 22 days they were there, yet they still went out and did the work.

"The students gave absolutely wholeheartedly all they had in service," said Anderson. "They surrendered their lives, families, and communications – everything to work as many hours a day to do as much as they could. They wanted to make a difference. They picked up hammers, sledgehammers and shovels, and tried to turn it around."

On one of the days, students worked with Catholic Charities to tear down a building once used as a food bank. Before starting, they needed to remove everything inside. It proved a daunting task. Mold grew up the sides of boxes and piles of food were infested with mice and cockroaches. Even the canned goods were covered with rust.

After the students created an enormous trash pile outside the structure, they began to prep the house for demolition, trying to salvage as much of reusable material as possible. They tore out

we were a bunch of hippies from California," said Verrips, who helped in the demolition. "In one day, we had torn the whole thing down. They were blown away."

In addition to building

growing predicament – but she will continue to find ways to return. "I want students to recognize that it matters what they do – to get it into their heads to change the world," she said.



Photo by David R Blanchard



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demolition, students painted houses, buffed floors, weeded and rebuilt a community garden, and worked closely with Habitat for Humanity building new homes for hurricane victims.

"There's so much work to be done down there, but there's not enough manpower," said Verrips. Hurricane Katrina is estimated to have been responsible for more than \$80 billion in damage and left thousands homeless. "People still have not received Federal aid, or it's a fraction of the cost to rebuild. Originally we wanted to sheetrock and paint a house, but it's hard to find contractors [to oversee



Photos by David R Blanchard



Photo by Ken C. Young, Moraga; www.kcyoungfineartimages.com

Go Gaels!

Upcoming Saint Mary's Sports Events

Wednesday, April 4

• Women's Softball vs. Fresno State; Noon and 2 p.m. at Cotrell Field

Thursday, April 5

• Men's Baseball vs. San Diego; 3 p.m. at Louis Guisto Field

• Men's Tennis vs. Pacific; 3 p.m. at Korth Tennis Complex

Friday, April 6

• Men's Baseball vs. San Diego; 2 p.m. at Louis Guisto Field

Saturday, April 7

• Men's Baseball vs. San Diego; 1 p.m. at Louis Guisto Field

We wish all the Saint Mary's student-athletes the best of luck as they enter competition at games away from home this week. For information on all out-of-town games, visit the official Saint Mary's athletics website: www.SMCGaels.com.

Campus Happenings

Special Events:

Paper Art Workshop

(In conjunction with current "Paper Cuts" exhibition)

Sunday, April 15 from noon to 3 p.m.

Soda Activity Center

Pre-registration opens at 11:30 a.m.

\$5 per person (to partially offset materials and instructors fee)

Underwritten by the Walker Family Foundation

Lectures:

Abigail Thomas

Author of two collections of short stories, "Herb's Pajamas" and "Getting over Tom," the novel "An Actual Life" and, most recently, two memoirs, "Safekeeping" and "A Three Dog Life."

Wednesday, April 11 at 7:30 p.m.

Soda Activity Center

Free

Jon Waterman

Author of "Where the Mountains are Nameless: Passion and Politics in the Arctic Refuge" discusses global warming and oil development in the Wildlife Refuge. Waterman was part of an expedition to the Arctic last year that discovered melting permafrost, disappearing glaciers and dying forests.

Thursday, April 12 at 7 p.m.

Soda Activity Center

Free

Robert Hass '63

"Study War No More: Kant, Violence and the Literary Imagination" Robert Hass, an English professor at the University of California at Berkeley and the former U.S. poet laureate, will focus on Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace."

Part of the annual Brother Robert Lecture Series, the event celebrates the Jubilee Year of Saint Mary's Integral Program.

Saturday, April 21 at 5:30 p.m.

Soda Activity Center

Ticket price for the lecture is \$30 per person, which benefits the endowment. A reception for Robert Hass follows in Claeys Lounge. To register, contact Saint Mary's Alumni Office at (800) 800-2586.

Concerts:

"The Music of Spain"

Dawn Foster-Dodson, cellist and SMC faculty member, in concert with pianist Irene Gregorio, will feature folk songs and folk dances from Spain and the English countryside.

Sunday, April 22 at 3 p.m.

Saint Mary's College Chapel

Free

Art Exhibitions:

"Paper Cuts: The Art of Contemporary Paper"

Continues through April 29

Hearst Art Gallery

Free

"William Keith: The 1870s Paintings"

Reopened Saturday, March 24

Hearst Art Gallery, William Keith Room

Free

For more information about upcoming events at Saint Mary's College, visit the college website at www.stmarys-ca.edu/news_events/.

Jennifer Wake is the Saint Mary's section editor for Lamorinda Weekly and is a former director of public relations and writer for Saint Mary's College. You can reach her with any comments or story ideas at jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com.