

HELPING OUT KATRINA VICTIMS

When hurricanes spread destruction across the South, three staff members from Diakon Family Life Services' Upper Susquehanna program went to the aid of those in need.



Julie Bakley

"Years ago, I asked myself why somebody didn't do something to make life better for people who are suffering. After Hurricane Katrina hit, I realized that I was somebody, and that I needed to go and help," says Julie Bakley, a Diakon counselor in Williamsport. Two Lewisburg-based staff members, Janet Evans, a counselor, and Colleen Bogner, a social worker, also responded. "We feel very blessed," says Mark Basinger, former director of the Upper Susquehanna-based offices of Diakon Family Life Services. "We are proud to have people with such amazing spirit. These are people who give of themselves everyday to help those in need." As part of a Red Cross team, Bakley was primarily stationed in Mobile, Ala., where she worked at a makeshift distribution center inside a vacated department store. "The first day I arrived, it was 125 degrees inside of the building and outside temperatures were reaching 100. There were hundreds of frustrated people standing in line for hours in this heat trying to get help," she says. Bakley calmed those waiting in line for assistance, counseled volunteers through stressful situations, helped with structural assessments of houses ravaged by the storm, and made local resource referrals for community members.

"There was a daycare center inside, where the kids could play. One little boy walked in front of a large industrial fan and began screaming. The noise and strong breeze of the fan reminded him Katrina. His mother said he reacts this way every time the wind blows. His mother did not know where to turn for help so we found local counseling for him," says Bakley.

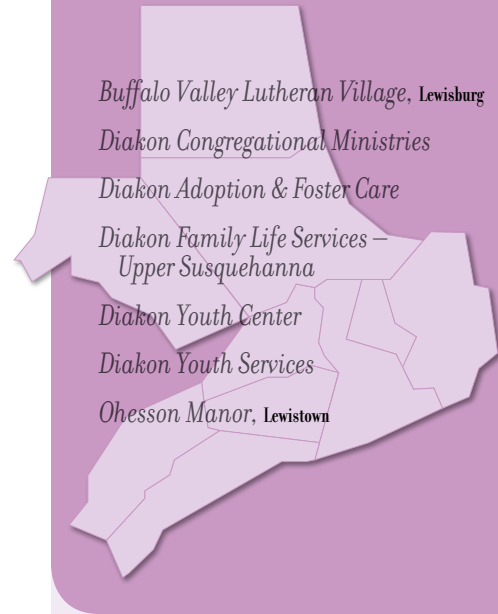
In addition to safety concerns—"the media had announced that each volunteer was given \$900, which put us in danger every time we left the building. Anytime we were out, we needed to take our name tags off," she says—she faced health concerns from mold, with many volunteers sent home early with what she called "Katrina Cough." Evans and Bogner were deployed to the Red Cross National Call Center in Virginia, where they handled calls from distraught individuals needing a wide range of assistance. Although they felt physically distant from the devastation, they nevertheless found themselves in the emotional heart of it.

They matched callers with information such as the locations of shelters and food pantries and later served as part of a mental health unit, through which they counseled those affected by the storms, as well as other volunteer call-takers. One story particularly touched Bogner's heart: A woman "had traveled to New Orleans with her two pet pugs to help take care of her mother who was dying of cancer. Two weeks after she got there she was evacuated. She said, 'I can't leave; I need to get my mother.' The rescuers told her she didn't have time—and that they would get her mother. They never did."

"It doesn't surprise me they went out of their way to help others," says Basinger. "It is completely within their characters to do the extraordinary."



Left to right: Janet Evans and Colleen Bogner



- Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village, Lewisburg
- Diakon Congregational Ministries
- Diakon Adoption & Foster Care
- Diakon Family Life Services – Upper Susquehanna
- Diakon Youth Center
- Diakon Youth Services
- Ohesson Manor, Lewistown



WISH LIST

BUFFALO VALLEY LUTHERAN VILLAGE

- Resident Lifts (must meet organizational standards)
- Tape and CD players
- Radios
- CDs, DVDs, videos
- Games (Checkers, UNO, Dominoes, Parcheesi, etc.)
- Fleece throws
- Clothing, mostly L-XL Sizes (women – pullover or button-up front sweaters, novelty/printed sweatshirts, button-up front sweatshirts; men – L-XL pajama pants or sweatpants, sweatshirts or flannel shirts)
- Large-screen television

DIAKON CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRIES & DIAKON FAMILY LIFE SERVICES

- Portable phone with answering machine
- Six-foot bookcase.
- Girls on The Run scholarships – \$50 per girl for the school year, \$20 per girl for summer programs
- Digital camera with printing dock

Diakon Place: Helping to Change a Neighborhood

In early October, Diakon staff and board leaders and local community and governmental officials dedicated Diakon Place, a major investment in an economically challenged East Baltimore neighborhood. Formerly an auto center and supermarket, the abandoned building, now completely refurbished, houses offices for Diakon Housing & Community Development and Diakon Family Life Services – Maryland and Diakon KidzStuff's state-of-the-art child-care center.

DELAWARE-MARYLAND



UPPER SUSQUEHANNA



Roll in the New, Donate the Old

When Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries began to replace all of its nursing care beds with new electric ones, staff members had no idea their decision would help people halfway around the world. When the two Diakon senior living communities in the Upper Susquehanna Synod—Ohesson Manor at Lewistown and Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village in Lewisburg—rolled in the new beds, the older electric and manual ones were rolled out and donated to several causes.

Ohesson donated nearly 100 manual beds to the Upper Susquehanna Synod, which in turn sent them to Liberia.

“The hand of the Lord is in all of this,” says Dr. Robert Bradford, global missions facilitator for the synod. “This project came at a particularly good time.” Just as a group of synod volunteers returned from Liberia, where they helped to rebuild Curran Lutheran Hospital, Zorzor, damaged during the Liberian civil war, they received word of Diakon’s

gift. “The volunteer work crew put a new roof on the hospital, replaced walls, laid new tile on the floor, and completed general renovations,” says Bradford. “It was ready to receive patients again—it just needed beds.” Rebels had stolen the beds and, without the means to replace them, the hospital could provide only outpatient care. But with Diakon’s contribution and the synod’s effort to help rebuild the war-torn country, the hospital will once again function as a hospital should. Responsible for shipping the beds to Liberia, the synod also has worked to raise funds to purchase new mattresses.

“We are so pleased that our beds will be used to care for others, continuing Diakon’s mission to serve those in need,” says Cork Leiter, Ohesson Manor executive director.

Buffalo Valley’s donation of beds benefited those involved in a different reconstruction effort.

Once a month, since Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of the Gulf Coast, volunteers from Christ Wesleyan Church, Milton, have been helping to rebuild area homes. During a recent trip, the crew transported five donated electric beds to offer to older adults or those with special physical needs. “We will be making life a whole lot easier for people,” says Russell Davis, facilities director at the church. The remaining 13 electric beds, out of an 18-bed donation, may be used for the homebound and terminally ill among its 1,200-member congregation. The beds could also serve area individuals from all faiths as Christ Wesleyan Church participates in a community effort, the Hands Up Foundation.

“This is just another example of how Diakon is resourceful in serving as many people as possible,” says John Allison, Buffalo Valley executive director.

LOWER SUSQUEHANNA

Violin's Tradition Leads to Special Gift



Every year Kim Elicker would buy a Christmas gift—usually a toy or a piece of clothing—for a child served by Diakon's foster care program. As she perused this last year's gift list, something caught her eye.

It was a request for a violin.

A musician, Elicker was intrigued. Just how serious was the child about playing? Investigating, she came to learn

that a teenage girl, who had played the violin for six years, had made the request because her instrument had been sold when she entered foster care.

Touched by the youth's situation, Elicker immediately approached her fellow musicians in the Hershey Symphony. One woman quickly raised her hand, offering to donate a violin that belonged to her.

"For her to say, 'here,' was a huge, huge thing," says Elicker, noting that the instrument was more than 100 years old with an intriguing story behind it. "From the beginning, this violin was always given, never sold, except for its original purchase. The girl would be the fifth owner."

The donor was no longer playing the violin and believed it was time to pass it on. "She wanted to keep the tradition of the violin alive and give it to someone who would appreciate it," says Elicker. "She even cleaned up the violin and added new strings."

The opportunity to share the holiday spirit with children and youths served by Diakon is a long-standing tradition at Zion Lutheran Church, Hummelstown. When Elicker returned to her congregation with news of the donated violin, other members stepped forward to make sure the gift included a new case, bow, shoulder pad, chin rest and other accessories, as well as Hershey Symphony tickets.

"It was very much a community gift," Elicker insists. "Because I play the viola, I understood we would need the accessories if we wanted to make it a complete gift. With the donation of the violin, we were able to do that."

The magnitude of the gift was not lost on the girl. When Kelly Smith of Diakon Adoption & Foster Care presented her with the gift, the youth "cried for several minutes and kept repeating that it was the best gift she had ever received. Ironically," says Smith, "her high school orchestra concert was that same night and she was able to take the violin and play it at the concert."

Zion's members "have gone out of their way for years to ensure that kids get their specific requests," adds Smith. "In this situation, they were able to make a miracle happen for a very special young lady."

NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Bereavement Camps Offer Safe Haven

For youngsters like Jessica Adamczyk, 11, Camp Evergreen, a Diakon Children's Bereavement Program, provides a safe haven to explore and discuss the emotions experienced after a loved one dies.

"I came here to express my feelings and talk with the other kids and the counselors. My dad died in a car accident when I was just two years old and my friend, who was 8, just died in a four-wheeler accident," says Adamczyk.

In the rural setting of Camp Kresge, White Haven, Adamczyk and approximately a dozen other campers, ages eight to 14, participated in a weekend camp this summer. Geared towards helping youngsters cope with loss through therapeutic activities and peer, counselor, and volunteer interaction, the camp helps children regain normalcy in life.

"When participants meet other kids who have experienced loss, they know they are not alone," says Christina Fedorko, children's bereavement specialist and camp organizer.

"They quickly bond and support each other throughout the weekend."

Camp Evergreen offers a myriad of activities such as fishing, swimming, boating, sand art, creating memory boxes, journaling feelings, campfire time, planting flowers and a symbolic evergreen tree. Through informal and formal activities, children discuss their experiences with death with one another and the trained volunteers and counselors.

Diakon recently began an expansion of the program to enable more children to be served.

SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Twining Village Purchased

Earlier in 2006, Diakon announced the purchase of Twining Village, a Continuing Care Retirement Community in Holland, Bucks County, Pa.



BUFFALO VALLEY'S DYNAMIC DUO

Bill and Ethel Owens are no strangers to the art of performing. Ever since the two were married—some 72 years ago—they have been a dynamic duo, both on and off the stage.



As a one-man band, Mr. Owens plays a myriad of instruments including the harmonica, banjo, accordion, and violin. While Mrs. Owens jokes that she is “second fiddle,” she concentrates on making audiences laugh with witty comments and riddles. “We’ve entertained all of our lives, it’s just something we enjoy,” says her husband.

Before becoming residents of the care center at Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village, a Diakon Senior Living Community, less than a year ago, the couple frequently performed at area nursing centers. “About 20 years ago, we use to play here every Monday night,” says Mr. Owens. “We did it all. Ethel would tell jokes to make them laugh and I sang what I heard and knew.”

Although interest in music came at an early age, Mr. Owens never learned to read music—instead he plays by ear. As a youngster he would listen to what he described as “old-fashioned radio” and then mimic the tune on a musical instrument. After he met his wife, he had her sing tunes over and over until he could commit them to memory. “I drove her crazy learning to play,” he laughs. “For weeks she’d be singing the same tune.”

With a repertoire that includes American folk songs, hymns, and popular tunes, Mr. Owens was so widely recognized that Spike Jones, the 1940s icon known for having fun with music, asked him to join his band. Wanting to stay by the side of his love, he refused to travel and declined the invitation. He did, however, perform solo while serving on a battle ship in Pearl Harbor.

Today, the couple is inseparable. They still organize their microphones, amplifiers, and instruments to perform for village events. “They are so full of energy, and they have such a positive outlook on life,” noted a former activities director. They “are definitely a team—an amazing team.”



OHESSON MANOR RESIDENTS REACH OUT TO CHILDREN



Wendy Knouse

When Ohesson Manor’s Sales & Marketing Director Wendy Knouse and her husband felt a calling to spread the Good News to others in an impoverished area of Costa Rica, they packed their bags. “The call to go into other worlds was laid upon our hearts,” says Knouse. “We have so much in this country and those people have so little.”

Located just six kilometers from the border of Nicaragua, the area of outreach, in some instances, had no electricity or running water. Instead of siding, houses were protected by plastic bags. “There is just not enough work for the people there and the work they do have—cutting down sugar cane—is extremely dangerous,” says Knouse.

Before leaving the United States as team leaders of a local church work group, the Knouses packed much-needed tools, supplies, clothing donations, and something very special—100 crosses handmade by Ohesson Manor residents who participate in the Red Hats Society.

“We heard that some of the children had never seen a cross before,” says resident Ella Shirk. “We were so happy to make something for the children—something they could relate to Christ.”



Children display the crosses made for them by Ohesson Manor residents.

IN MEMORIAM

The following memorial gifts were received between October 22, 2005 and June 26, 2006. Diakon programs thank these donors in the Upper Susquehanna Synod for their generous contributions.

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The Rev. Dr. Theodore Lindquist, Jr.

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