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Stepping up to help

Students arrive like 'cavalry' to aid rebuilding of homes in post-Katrina Mississippi

By **William Rock** / Daily Staff Writer
(3.21.06)

When ISU student Kyle Mueller first heard about going to Mississippi to help rebuild damage from Hurricane Katrina, he was a little skeptical. Looking back, he wouldn't have changed it for anything.

"If you'd asked me a month before Spring Break, I was probably planning on going home to work," said Mueller, senior in construction engineering. "But I got talked into it, and it was a real blast. I'm really glad I did it."

Mueller was one of 28 members of the ISU chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America that went to Waveland, Miss., during Spring Break. The group participated in a program coordinated by the Morrell Foundation and Community Collaborations International.

Laura Halleemann, representative for CCI, said the ISU group's arrival "was like the cavalry."

"Hands down, out of all the groups that came down here, we were definitely sad when the

Iowa State kids left," she said.

Part of the appreciation stems from the tools the ISU group brought with them.

"We found out later, each group down there, their school paid their expenses and each student only had to pay like a hundred dollars," said Ryan Ferris, senior in construction engineering.

"Instead, we went around to local businesses and contractors and asked for donations."

Mueller said the group ended up raising close to \$10,000 and borrowed a 26-foot trailer filled with construction tools. The group's background in construction also proved valuable.

"Most of the experience people have is from working residential construction or internships," Mueller said. "They paired us up with people who didn't really know what they were doing, and I bet everyone's a pro roofer now."

Halleman said the group resingled nine roofs, drywalled and plastered two houses and set windows and doors in several others.

"We finished the last roof Thursday night with two people holding flashlights over me while I nailed in shingles," Ferris said. "But we got it done."

The group's efforts attracted local and even national attention, including a story by WLOX-TV in Biloxi, a feature on CNN and culminating with a live interview by MSNBC.

Although there were 350 other volunteers in Waveland, AGC became "the go-to group," Halleman said.

"We're under a burn ban here," she said.

"But they were actually the only group the police let build bonfires, because they knew just how to do it."

The trip wasn't without setbacks - Ferris and another student went to the hospital to be treated for reactions to mosquito and gnat bites.

"It was 85 degrees and I figured I'd go roofing in shorts one day," Ferris said. "But it was jeans from there on out."

The greatest appreciation, however, came from local residents.

"Every person came up and thanked you and told you their story," Mueller said. "You don't know what to say, just 'I'm sorry for your loss, and I wish I could do more to help you.'"

Back in Iowa, Mueller is now glad he spent his Spring Break helping others.

"It was a life-changing experience," he said.

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cjahren

3/21/06 @ 1:36 PM EST

Congratulation to the AGC Student Chapter for a job well done! I am at the Associated General Contractors of America Convention and have shared your accomplishments with the professional constructor that are attending. ([Continued...](#))

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