

Students give Harvey rebuilding break

Dave Rogers
For The Record

It's spring break time and more than 100 college kids from Georgia and Ohio are partying down with Sheetrock.

"We've been planning this trip for months," Heather Sumner of Middle Georgia State said. "This is better than the beach."

Sumner is one of a dozen students from the Cochran, Georgia, school and 19 more from Atlanta's Georgia State spending their week in Orange County as guests of the Texas Baptist Men housed at Orange's Navy Barracks.

The rest of the 112 students staying at the TBM encampment this week are from the University of Georgia and the University of Cincinnati.

They are volunteering their weeklong vacation from school to help folks in Orange County rebuild their homes after last summer's devastating Hurricane Harvey.

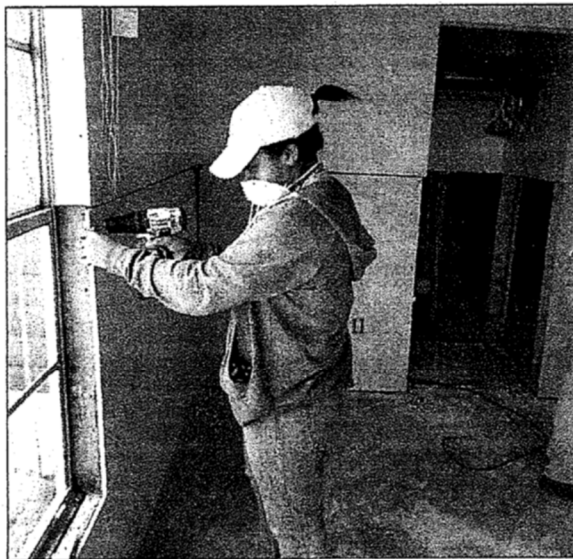
"We just basically want to help and serve others," said Jay Harrison, another student.

"We have so much ourselves. We're doing the best we can do to help others."

The Texas Baptist Men have run their Disaster Relief and Rebuild operations out of Orange's 1945 naval base since November.

By the end of 2017, TBM volunteers had contributed 31,942 days of work to the effort, which extends throughout Harvey's path, from the Corpus Christi area to the south up to Orange and Newton Counties.

The month of March will see the arrival in Orange of more students like the ones from Georgia and Ohio coming to work, because there still is work to be done.



Tiffany Alexander of Georgia State is one of more than 100 students from Georgia and Ohio universities helping Hurricane Harvey victims rebuild their homes as part of the Texas Baptist Men's Rebuild project being operated out of the Port of Orange.

"We've got 177 work orders and we've probably completed 70 [home rebuilds]. And they're still calling," said Patsy McDowell.

A retiree from Longview, she is part of adult volunteer groups from East Texas and northeast Arkansas on hand to provide leadership, food and laundry service to the workers who spend each day working in flood-damaged homes.

McDowell is halfway through her third two-week stay in Orange after working with TBM in Katy last fall. She welcomed the young faces that began arriving Saturday.

"The Texas teams are frazzled," she said. "Now we're relying on college kids to help us."

Many of the students have been on missionary trips in the past, McDowell said.

"But on most of those, you're painting or doing trim work. This is different: hanging Sheetrock, tape and mud, things they've

never done before," she said.

"But they're working and doing a good job. I don't think when I was 18 or 20 I could have done that."

Adult Michele Coursey, a ministry assistant for the Georgia State group, works alongside the young adults.

"We go on a spring break trip every year," she said.

The students look forward to their outreach.

"There's something about hard work that is grounding," said student Aimee Withdraw of Georgia State.

"This gives us a chance to share Jesus," Sumner said.

"This lets us get together and share with others," Harrison said.

The workers return to the barracks each day in late afternoon to clean up and eat dinner prepared by the feeding teams.

After dinner, there's music and fellowship with the other students.

"I enjoy getting to meet new people," Harrison said.

We spent a week in Orange TX helping with the maintenance, showers and laundry, assisting the people from Arkansas, Georgia, Ohio and the ones from Texas. We spent lots of long hours to get things done. We surely had a great time with this adventure.

Marketa and John Kemp

