

New Mexico Lions "Adopt" Club in Community Hard Hit by Katrina

It was at the November 2005 board meeting of the Ruidoso Valley Noon, New Mexico, Lions Club that Dick Cottrill suggested a unique idea. He told members that he had seen news reports that some areas in southern Mississippi that had been devastated by Hurricane Katrina were not receiving as much assistance as towns in Louisiana. He suggested that Ruidoso Valley Lions provide help by "adopting" a Lions club in one of the many Mississippi communities suffering damage.

After checking a Lions Clubs International Directory, Cottrill contacted Diamondhead, Mississippi, Lions Club President Ted McCabe. They had several conversations about how the two clubs could come together to help the Diamondhead community in its recovery efforts.

It was decided that the top priority would be to make the Bay Waveland North Elementary School library functional again. It had been totally destroyed by the hurricane's fury and FEMA buildings were being put in place so children could at least attend school. Although parts of the structure were still standing, everything inside the school was ravaged, including all books and computers in the library.

Cottrill and McCabe both agreed that the clubs' major emphasis should be replacing computers and K-3 library books.

Ruidoso Valley Lions quickly "passed the hat" at a meeting and raised almost \$300. The money was used to buy books and ship them to Diamondhead in time for Christmas. Another \$1,250 in club funds was designated for relief efforts.

Cottrill and Lions Gary Henry and Vic Dunham planned an auction to be held during the club's annual Christmas party. That project raised another \$1,700 to be sent to Diamondhead Lions to use at their discretion.

Cottrill contacted Nob Hill School in Ruidoso to ask if teachers and students would be willing to "reach out" to Diamondhead's children. Teacher Teri Hardiman coordinated the efforts and the school and staff donated several boxes of books and teaching materials. Nob Hill students collected coins and raised \$223 for the Mississippi school children.

Lions planned a March 13 departure date to bring the many donations to Diamondhead because the cost of shipping all supplies would be prohibitive. The entire community of Ruidoso became involved and even more donations, checks and gift cards started coming for the residents of Diamondhead. Cottrill even briefed the local Rotary club on Lions' efforts and received a \$400 contribution from Rotarians.



Ruidoso Valley Lion Dick Cottrill and teacher Teri Hardiman visit with two of the students from Nob Hill Preschool. The jar contains \$223 that the children collected for Hurricane Katrina's Diamondhead victims.



Diamondhead residents select needed items as they're unloaded from the truck.

Club President Valari Chavez, Dunham, Henry and Lion Bryson McCool headed east with a truck full of donations. Unfortunately, Cottrill, who put the whole project into motion, wasn't able to make the trip because he was in the process of moving out of state.

When Ruidoso Valley Lions arrived at the designated church parking lot for unloading, Diamondhead Lions and other residents were waiting for them. The computers and books were immediately sent to the school and other donations were sent to a FEMA warehouse for distribution.

McCool says, "None of the Ruidoso group will ever forget the elderly gentleman who came up during the unloading process, introduced himself and gave us a big hug.

"He said, 'Thank God for folks like you all. Your kindness and caring will help us make it through this terrible time.' "

McCabe gave the four Ruidoso Valley Lions a tour of the area before they departed for home that same day. McCool reports: "Never have any of us seen such devastation that words alone cannot describe. The area must be seen in person to fully comprehend the full extent of the damage."

Regardless of the circumstances, McCool says, "The folks in Diamondhead were some of the nicest we have ever met. Their strength and positive attitude in such a time of strife are extraordinary. It was an honor to be able to serve with such a great group of people." ■