

January 06, 2006

New Paltz student learns first hand about social service

Editor's note: Five SUNY New Paltz psychology students are spending two weeks working with the Red Cross in disaster relief in New Orleans. The students arrived Dec. 29 and have spent long days since, serving meals to people affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The students received Red Cross training before they were deployed. This is the first of a series of dispatches from the students - graduate student Jessica Walsh, 26, and undergraduate students Jemma Binder, 21; Zachary James Joyce, 21; Dawn Birk, 21; and Nellie Afshar, 20.

By Zachary James Joyce

I've never saved someone's life before, but that is exactly what a woman told me I did today. "If it weren't for the Red Cross, I'd be dead, I'd have starved." I'd never imagined that two pieces of chicken, a scoop of peas, some bread, water, and snacks (a meager daily portion by my standards) could go so far. But in some of these neighborhoods, it can go a long way. It could mean the world to people who have nothing else, or just a stress relief knowing you don't have to worry about what you're going to eat while working to fix up your house.

For the past three days, I've been riding in an ERV (emergency relief vehicle) delivering meals, water, essential supplies and a friendly presence to people whose lives have been flipped upside down by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. It has been some of the most satisfying and the most disappointing work I've ever been a part of. Satisfied and proud of the 1,500 people I've personally helped to feed, and terribly disappointed over the great need of many more.

When people back home have asked me what I'm doing here, I start off with, "I'm doing the best I can, I'm doing what these people would do for me if I needed it." What has been perhaps most touching for me so far is how anxious the people in New Orleans are to be able to give back to the American Red Cross. "Oh, I'm going to donate as soon as I get back on my feet."

[TOP](#)

Copyright Orange County Publications, a division of Ottaway Newspapers Inc., all rights reserved.