

Katrina devastation touches DDC employees

Jan James and Mark Malone spend vacation as relief workers

By Jessica Walter, DDC Command Affairs

Defense Distribution Center (DDC) Material Processing Support Team Lead Jan James and Defense Distribution Depot Susquehanna, Pa. (DDSP), Welder Mark Malone spent their vacations on the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast of Mississippi to assist in efforts to rebuild the small town of Ocean Springs.

James and Malone, along with former DDSP Safety and Environmental Manager Dale Glacken, boarded a bus March 17 for the 22-hour trip from Pennsylvania to Mississippi. The bus held 33 people from Central Pennsylvania churches and rebuilding supplies like shovels, rakes, saws and brooms.

Along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico and less than 10 minutes from Biloxi, Miss., the group arrived at the remains of Ocean Springs, a town of middle to upper class people whose lives were changed forever in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina last September.

“All you could see was people’s clothing hanging in the tree branches ... along with teddy bears, bicycles, beds,” James recalled as she looked through photos from the trip. “These were people’s belongings. It’s just gone.”

James, Malone and Glacken were part of a group that volunteered to be part of CORE, Christians Organized for Relief Efforts. CORE has established a base camp for the organization and mobilization of volunteers to aid in rebuilding the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

For nearly a week, they assisted with removing debris from houses and helping to rebuild – installing tile and carpet, painting walls and fixing roofs



Houses along the Mississippi Gulf Coast were destroyed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. “All you could see was people’s clothing hanging in the tree branches ... along with teddy bears, bicycles, beds,” James recalled.

to complete what many homeowners had already begun. “They did what they could on their own, but they couldn’t do it all,” said Malone.

Although the volunteers were there to help rebuild houses in the town, the mission also involved rebuilding lives.

“We were told that the work wasn’t the most important thing, that it was also important to talk to the people and to listen to their stories,” said James.

Malone spent a week working on the home of Dorothy, an 80-year-old woman who was recently widowed. “We helped Dorothy get her house back together, but we also spent a lot of time listening to her, helping her through her feelings.”

The group met many residents who had lost everything in the floods and winds that battered the coast in the hurricane’s wake.

“One lady told me how her house had flooded with eight feet of water. Her four-post bed floated to the top of the room and punctured the ceiling,” James said, “yet her sheets remained completely dry.”

Impressed by the determination of the people in the town, they also recounted the story of a 76-year-old woman who survived the flood against all odds. “She literally had to swim out of



Route 90 that connects Ocean Springs, Miss., to Biloxi, Miss., was destroyed in the flood caused by Hurricane Katrina. “Thirty foot waves coming at you at 90 miles per hour – how can you picture that?” asked Malone. “When you see this bridge, you can understand how the homes never had a chance.”

her house,” James said. “She swam through the door, through her back yard, and to her neighbor’s property that was on higher land. All she could do was stand there and watch as her house flooded.”

The group saw houses that looked like housing frames used for new construction. All of the windows, walls and doors had been blown off by the wind. One house even had a hot tub on top of the shed and a flower pot on the roof.



The winds and storms following Hurricane Katrina were strong enough to topple a lighthouse onto a golf course in Ocean Springs, Miss.

James recalled another woman whose house was being torn down on the same street as a house she was helping to rebuild. “She just pulled up in her car and cried as she watched her house being torn down.”

In the cafeteria at a nearby church, the volunteers met an 80-year-old man whose house had so much water in it that he and his wife had to stand on the furniture to avoid the rising water. “His wife didn’t make it,” James said as she paused, reflecting on the conversation. “She drowned in his arms.”

James said she could have never prepared herself for what she saw when she was in Ocean Springs. “I’ve never experienced anything like this before.”

James said she had seen flooded

buildings and she had seen the coverage of the storm on the news, seen what the storm had done to the houses there. “I expected it to be bad. I knew it would be bad. I just didn’t realize it would be this bad, and it’s going to be that way for a long time. I just don’t think people realize the impact this hurricane had on the country.”

Driven by the strong desire to help the people the group came

to know very well, they did everything they could in the short week they were there – loading a delivery of drywall into storage trailers, cleaning a house with a bleach and water mixture to kill mold growing on the walls, retiling floors, replacing electrical wiring,

repairing roofs, and painting a church.

“You didn’t think about eating or drinking during the day. You did your work, came back and ate dinner, took a shower, then started a new day,” said James.

The volunteer group slept in tents and showered in small trailers provided by a local church. Meals were provided by other CORE volunteers.

Glacken called the work “demanding, but rewarding.”

Malone and



Donning a hard hat, respirator and gloves, James and her group helped to remove black mold from the Mississippi homes affected by Hurricane Katrina using a bleach and water mixture.

Glacken have already been on two mission trips to Ocean Springs and plan to go again this year.

“We just really wanted to help these people, and we wanted to leave knowing we helped them,” said James.

“At the end of the day, all that matters is who you serve,” said Glacken.

For the volunteers, the experience was spiritual, even life changing. They came to give, but they left with so much more.

For more information on CORE, visit www.corebasecamp.com.



Since September, more than 4,000 volunteers have worked 350,000 hours to clean and rebuild nearly 1,000 buildings including this church in Ocean Springs, Miss.