

Andrews Assists Victims of Recent Local Flooding

Providing temporary housing, food, clothing and hands-on cleanup

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Second shift prepares to depart for clean-up work in Niles, Michigan. (Photo by Ben Panigot, director, Campus Safety)

By: Hannah Gallant, IMC student writer

On Tuesday, Feb. 20, 2018, Berrien County began to experience the beginnings of a major flood. Due to rapid snow melt and excessive rainfall by Thursday, Feb. 22, the St. Joseph River crested at 17.33 feet in Niles, Michigan, thereby exceeding the major flood level of 15 feet and leading to the evacuation of many local residents.

In response to the displacement of flood victims, Guest Services & University Towers began housing flood victims on Thursday, Feb. 22. Temporary housing was provided for two staff members, four community families and five students. Long-term housing was arranged for three of those students who completely lost their apartments and homes. Meal tickets and boxed breakfasts were provided to flood victims through the first weekend, and care packages were given to students who lost many items in the flood. Guest Services also provided showers for victims staying at the Red Cross shelter in the Village Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In addition to assisting on campus, Andrews University participated in community flood cleanup in both Berrien Springs and Niles, Michigan. On Saturday, Feb. 24, Campus Ministries worked

with Neighbor 2 Neighbor to send 20 volunteers to pack cleanup buckets. Andrews continued to participate in service opportunities as scheduled by local government. On Friday, March 2, 39 Andrews students/employees worked in conjunction with the City of Niles to do flood cleanup in the surrounding area. On Saturday and Sunday, a total of 50 students/employees worked through United Way in the River Springs Estates area in Berrien Springs to clean out flooded mobile homes and yards. Teams were assigned to help carry and dispose of items that had been damaged or ruined by the water. Also on Saturday, 15 students/employees from the School of Education worked with the Red Cross to provide childcare and entertainment for the children of River Springs Estates flood victims while their parents helped with flood cleanup.

On March 12, 12 seminary students, faculty and staff volunteers assisted flood victims in the area at the end of Kephart Lane in Berrien Springs. Various organizations in the community gave support: the Michiana Fil-Am Seventh-day Adventist Church offered use of their facilities for staging and lunch; Apple Valley discounted food; Encore Auto donated use of a trailer; Andrews Campus Safety provided training and supplies; and Andrews Plant Services supplied gloves.

Out of nine homes, five experienced flooding inside their houses. The volunteers picked up trash and raked debris from lawns, cut up and hauled away logs, etc., that had floated in from the river, and cleaned out the inside of one house that had been flooded. One large dumpster was filled so much that a backhoe had to come and compress the trash so more could be added.

One of the homeowners said, "You and your crew have saved us an entire summer of labor...I can't say enough about the entire team's positive attitude, sense of fun, loving spirit and hard work. Consider us blessed."

A seminary student volunteer said, "The owner of the house where I was working had been struggling with moving all the trash for two weeks and it seemed like nothing was done. When he saw how fast we cleaned his house he was really thankful, and I could see an expression of relief on his face. I was blessed to see that. Please, let me know if there is going to be another effort to help the community."

Teela Ruehle, an associate dean and associate director of Guest & Convention Services at University Towers, helped coordinate the University's response to the community and also attended the Saturday, March 3 cleanup. She says, "For me it was a beautiful experience to see the whole community—Andrews, Village officials, police, churches and schools—working together to help our neighbors during a time of crisis. This is what God called us to do! And it was awesome to be a part of serving our community and seeing how many students were willing to come out and help!"