OSU students to rebuild hurricane-ruined homes

By Erin Marie Medick
Dispatch Staff Reporter

Some Ohio State University students will rough it for a week to help other people live in comfort.

Students in the OSU chapter of Habitat for Humanity International are to arrive in Miami and Homestead, Fla., today to help rebuild homes destroyed by Hurricane Andrew last summer. They are to return Saturday.

Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit organization that helps needy people build residences.

Jeff Koehn, 22, group leader and a senior majoring in civil engineering, said the OSU students will stay at a retreat in Homestead while helping to rebuild six houses.

"We'll sleep on the floor someplace," he said. "All of us will be sleeping in one room. But it's going to be a great experience."

Koehn said, "We've all had experience framing houses, setting windows and doors, hanging drywall, painting and doing trim work."

College students are the logical choice to volunteer to help, Koehn said.

"We're available from the second week in December until the third week in January. Who else can just pick up and leave like that?"

The students will pay for their lodging. Their food will be provided by other volunteers, Koehn said.

The international organization has raised $5 million to help in the effort, said Michelle Gordon of Habitat for Humanity, which is based in Americus, Ga. It has 802 affiliates in the United States and Canada.

Since its founding in 1976, Habitat for Humanity has built more than 17,500 residences, Gordon said. They plan to rebuild 200 to 500 houses in Florida within two years. The organization also plans to send people to the New Orleans area in the spring to help rebuild houses damaged by the hurricane.

Gordon said the OSU students will be among 70 students helping hurricane victims this season.

"This is a perfect opportunity for us to help someone less fortunate," said Heather Enders, 20.
OSU students see Hurricane Andrew’s wreckage firsthand

By Erskine Medlock
Dispatch Staff Reporter

Students from Ohio State University were surprised by the large amount of debris remaining in Florida from Hurricane Andrew.

“We were shocked by all the work that still needs to be done,” said Astrid Olfenbuttel. “Our eyes were really widened.”

“Right after the hurricane you would hear about all the destruction, but then the news reports died down and you don’t realize what still needs to be done.”

Olfenbuttel, 20, was among 10 students in the OSU chapter of Habitat for Humanity International who spent a week of their Christmas break in Miami and Homestead, Fla. The group helped residents rebuild houses destroyed by the hurricane.

Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit organization that helps needy people build homes.

Olfenbuttel, a communications major, said some members of the group worked in Homestead where houses had been leveled. They put finishing touches on seven houses other volunteers had rebuilt.

“We put on doors, caulked, painted and weatherproofed,” said Olfenbuttel.

Stacey Coburn, a chemical engineering major, said a plane ride enabled the students to see the destruction from the air.

“It was amazing,” said Coburn, 19. “Whole acres of trees were leveled. Broken tree trunks were everywhere. And every second or third house had its roof torn off.”

Coburn said most of those homes were occupied. “It’s amazing what people are living in,” she said. “There may just be half a house left, but the people have managed to live in what’s left.”

She was impressed with the people in both communities. “They’ve really pulled together,” she said. “Everyone is working to help one another.”
Students help hurricane victims

By Tanea Lewandowski
Lantern staff writer

Ten members of OSU's chapter of Habitat for Humanity International spent five days during winter break rebuilding homes for victims of Hurricane Andrew in Homestead, Fla.

Many of the students returned feeling a sense of accomplishment and unity.

"When we left, five homes were completed and families were getting ready to move in," said Kelly Darr, a junior in psychology. "That was a really satisfying feeling."

The students painted, caulked, framed doors and did other finish work on six homes, said Jeff Koehn, a senior in civil engineering and the group's leader.

The students rented a van and each paid $15 a day for food and lodging. The drive took two days each way, and made up nearly half of the nine-day trip, from Dec. 9 to Dec. 18.

Some of the students' expenses will be reimbursed. Private donors contributed funds and supplies, and the students are requesting reimbursement for some of their expenses from OSU Student Organizations Services, Koehn said.

Rob Morrison, a senior in surveying, said he gained a lot from the trip.

"There's a silver lining to every problem," Morrison said, "and this one brought ten people closer together."

"I don't have a television so I didn't know what to expect," Morrison said.

"We arrived at night. There were no street signs, and we couldn't tell which direction was north, south, east or west. We had a hard time finding our way around," Morrison said.

A majority of the buildings were boarded up and some had spray painted messages like: "Looters will be shot. This building is armed and manned," Darr said.

"I don't think they (the homeowners) mean to be violent, they're just trying to keep a hold of what they've got," Darr said.

Morrison said he didn't feel a sense a fear while visiting Homestead. He said it was no different than seeing homeless people walking down High Street.

Habitat for Humanity International builds homes for needy people; the OSU chapter was founded three years ago.

Because the OSU students were the first from the program to arrive in Homestead they also helped prepare the shelter for the next wave of students from other universities, building more than 100 bunk beds.

The organization is self-supporting and receives no government aid, Koehn said. He said they operate on private donations.

Darr said she hopes people are still willing to go down there to help because it's so devastated and will
Fund raising

Rob Morrison (left) and Rick Henderson, members of Habitat for Humanity, receive a donation from a student on the Oval Wednesday. The group is asking for donations to build houses in the Milo Grogan area of Columbus.
Flooding, hurricane aid given

Students from Ohio State University and Ohio Dominican College set aside their books and personal business for several days recently to help hurricane and flood victims rebuild homes.

The OSU chapter of Habitat for Humanity sent 10 students to Homestead, Fla., in December to work with Hurricane Andrew victims still struggling to overcome damage.

In a separate program, 10 Ohio Dominican students spent last week in West Alton, Mo., repairing or rebuilding homes damaged by last year's flooding in the Mississippi River basin.

The Dominican students raised $75 each to pay for their trip, and they stayed at St. Louis University.
Habitat offers alternative to spring break

By Heather L. Englund
Lantern staff writer

For those who want to do some work rather than just party over spring break, then the OSU Students for Habitat for Humanity organization might provide personal fulfillment of a different kind.

Habitat, an international non-profit organization, is sponsoring the Habitat for Humanity Collegiate Challenge, three spring break alternatives for those who want to make a difference while traveling at the same time.

The organization builds and restores houses across the world for families who do not make enough money to move out of poverty housing.

Astrid Olfenbuttel, president of the OSU chapter of Habitat, spoke to new members Tuesday about the history of the organization and the trips.

"The goal of Habitat is to eliminate poverty housing," Olfenbuttel said.

She also explained the alternative spring break packages to the group.

Olfenbuttel said they are planning three trips. One group of 30 people will be traveling to Abilene, Texas, 10 people will travel to Las Vegas, N.M., and the remaining 10 will be traveling to Winston-Salem, N.C.

The group will be working most of the mornings over break, but will have free time in the afternoons and evenings, she said.

Will Lennon, construction chair, said the people who come on the trip do not have to be experienced in building homes.

"We don't require any skills whatsoever," he said. "Just come and we'll teach you everything you need to know."

Lennon also said it is not only easy to get to know new people and have fun, but many people will learn to do things they have never tried.

"Along the way you'll learn some very useful skills," he said. "You'll meet some very interesting people."

The trips cost $150 per person, Olfenbuttel said. The price includes food, transportation to the site and lodging.
Students get out hammers for spring break

By Mary Bridgman
Dispatch Accent Reporter

While her friends get a tan and hang loose this week, college sophomore Angie Jackson will frame houses and hang doors.

Jackson and 14 other Denison University students are spending spring break in Tampa, Fla., as volunteers with Habitat for Humanity.

"It makes me feel needed," Jackson said before leaving. "It's like your spring break makes a difference in someone's life."

The students planned all school year for the trip and are paying their travel expenses. In addition, they collected $1,275 for Habitat through fund-raisers and solicitations; learned construction skills working Saturdays with Licking County's Habitat chapter; and, more recently, rented vans, planned menus and assigned chores for the adventure.

This week, Habitat has them for eight hours a day; the beach has them for one or two.

"I'd rather do something like this than stay home," said Jackson, a premed major from Cincinnati. "You meet a lot of people, and you're doing something worthwhile. It's a lot of fun."

Volunteer workweeks spent building and rehabilitating houses have become popular among college students nationwide.

While Habitat for Humanity seems the biggest promoter and benefactor, Break Away -- at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. -- and the Christian Appalachian Project in Lancaster, Ky., also are attracting more students.

Habitat has designated Feb. 20-April 9 its "Collegiate Challenge: Spring Break '94."

The effort has drawn 4,500 students — almost 100 from central Ohio universities, including Denison, Ohio State, Ohio Wesleyan and Wittenberg. Eleven other Ohio colleges also are represented.

Astrid Ofenbuttel, an OSU senior from Upper Arlington, will leave Friday for Las Vegas, N.M., on her fifth Habitat trip. Previous trips took her to Louisiana, Florida and Illinois.

"It's a way to have fun, do something productive, meet new people and see parts of the country," said the communications major and president of OSU's Habitat chapter. "Barriers break down; you get to know people very well."

Ofenbuttel, who will be with nine other OSU students, has cleared fields, hung windows and made foundations for Habitat houses. Next week, she will lay adobe brick.

"You learn by doing," she said. "You don't have to have any skill; the construction leaders break down what needs to be done into small steps."

Two other 10-member groups from OSU also will work next week for Habitat — in Winston-Salem, N.C., and Abilene, Texas.

Even with the best of intentions, students find that the workweeks aren't always problem-free.

Jackson and other Denison students went to Lexington, Ky., last year expecting to build houses. Instead, they cleaned a warehouse for four days and, on the fifth, framed a house for a Habitat exhibiton.

"It wasn't very fulfilling," she said. "We never got to work on a real house."

For D.J. Young, a junior at Ohio Wesleyan from Sandusky, Ohio, a Habitat project two weeks ago in New Iberia, La., was worse than a disappointment.

Young and five other volunteers were attacked by some teens-agers one evening as they walked from a convenience store to the center where they were staying.

"The attack was unprovoked," said Young, who suffered a badly bruised face, lost a front tooth and had his wallet stolen.

Another student suffered a black eye, and a third had a concussion.

No similar incident has occurred since Habitat started the college program five years ago, said Sonja Lewis, director of campus chapters.

Young won't let the misfortune stop him from participating in Habitat projects.

"It could have happened in Delaware or Columbus, Ohio. I shouldn't quit doing what I believe in."

Two years ago, Young and several friends went to Starkville, Miss., for Habitat.

"Everything went great," he said. "We met the people who would be living in the houses we worked on. It felt really good to do something good for your fellow human beings."
Volunteers’ work provides homes, sources of pride

By Li-Fen Li
Lantern staff writer

While many students are spending their Saturdays catching up on their studies, having fun with friends or enjoying a nap, the students in Habitat for Humanity are building homes for poor families.

“I never thought I would be able to build a house because I didn’t have any experience before,” said Shea Crawford, a senior in communication.

Crawford is one of about 80 students from all ranks and majors who have donated a small portion of their time to help build houses around Franklin and Delaware Counties for people in need.

The students meet on the steps of Ohio Union on Saturday mornings. The rest of the day is spent hammering, plastering, painting, framing and wiring.

Habitat for Humanity, which has had a student chapter for five years, assists other Habitat chapters with a variety of projects.

Volunteers for Habitat for Humanity are not required to have any building skills or construction tools, only a willingness to help.

Crawford, who knew nothing about house construction before getting involved, said now she knows how to install kitchen counters, set light switches and tile floors.

The homes the students build are no-interest mortgage homes. Recipients of the homes are required to contribute 500 hours of “sweat equity” toward their new home and the Habitat organization.

Crawford recalled an occasion when a Habitat family — a single mother and three children — came to work with the students. She said the children squealed and ran through each room, and their excitement in owning a nice house really cheered her up.

Cyndee Strelec, an animal science major working with the project, said she enjoys working with her hands and the satisfaction of completing a tough job.

“When the afternoon is over and I step back, looking what has been accomplished since the morning, it feels really good to know the house is much closer to being a home for someone,” Strelec said.

She said giving a few hours on Saturday morning definitely pays off. An appreciation for hard work and helping others results from being involved in the Habitat project, Strelec said.

Mike Moyer, a volunteer from the Columbus Habitat for Humanity chapter, recently spent a day with the OSU student group. He said he was impressed by their dedication.

“They are self-starters, and indeed, good workers,” Moyer said, “They must be special kids.”

Because the work day starts early — and as an added incentive — the group provides doughnuts for the morning munchies.

The volunteers make it clear, however, that their Saturday inspiration actually derives from their energy and enthusiasm to help the community.
OSU men ride cross country for Habitat donations

Half the journey is over for two men pedaling to raise money to go toward building a home

By Stacy Wood
Lantern staff writer

Imagine dropping everything for a quarter: school, work, family and friends to ride a bike across the United States. Two men from Ohio State are doing this to raise funds for a local charity.

Bob Eckhart, a 1995 OSU alumnus and lecturer in the English department, and Pat Donley, a pre-med student, are halfway finished with their journey across the U.S., which began April 1 in San Diego. They have raised $6,000 so far for the Greater Columbus Habitat for Humanity with hopes to raise $20,000 more by the time they are finished. They also hope to make people all over the U.S. more aware of what the national organization does, Eckhart said.

"We are a couple of kids who just did it on a whim," Eckhart said, who did not even own a bike until right before the trip began.

Donley and Eckhart, who each have about 60 pounds of gear, pack their bikes early each morning and ride until dusk, stopping only for lunch. They try to stick to back roads and make up their route as they go. They camp outside and have even bathed in a river.

"It's a great way to educate yourself," Donley said. "You learn a lot about yourself and others."

The amount raised through donations and pledges will help pay to build a house in which a local family can live, Eckhart said. Habitat for Humanity helps families who could not afford to own a house otherwise, buy homes. The Columbus chapter, which receives 300 to 500 applications a year from local families, builds 15 to 18 homes with the help of volunteers and the families who will buy the homes, said Richard Weese, executive director for the organization.

The bikers are planning to help the family build the house their fundraising efforts aided, Donley said.

"It will be great to see a direct outcome of the money we raised," Donley said.

Donley and Eckhart, who hope to be back in Columbus by May 12, said they hope other students will follow their lead.

"It's a good feeling to know you are going to help a family get a home," Donley said. "I think it's important as young people that we try to make an impact on the community."

There are many different and exciting ways for people to give their time, whether it's to Habitat or other groups, Weese said. He hopes Donley and Eckhart are proving that volunteering doesn't have to be boring, but can be fun.

"I hope they will be an example for other people, especially students at OSU, of different ways of giving back to the community," Weese said.

Photo courtesy of Bob Eckhart

Bob Eckhart, an English lecturer, and Pat Donley, a pre-med student, ride past Phoenix, Az., about halfway through their journey across the U.S. to raise money for Habitat for Humanity.
Habitat volunteers rebuild local home

By Sara Stutzenstein
Lantern staff writer

Rebuilding interior walls and replacing roofs and windows of deteriorated homes may sound like construction duties, but this is what the Ohio State chapter of Habitat for Humanity is doing to help a needy family. Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit housing ministry that encourages people of all faiths to work together to eliminate substandard housing and help needy families, said Josh Flory, OSU chapter president.

"I really enjoy going out after a week of classes and working with my hands for a great cause," Flory said. "Knowing that we're giving a family new hope and helping them get a new start on life makes us feel good."

Volunteers renovate old homes and build new homes for low-income families who can't afford to pay expensive building costs, Flory said.

The chapter now has a partnership with Executive Jet, a Columbus-based executive travel airline, to renovate a deteriorated home on Genesee Avenue, Flory said.

"This is the first time our chapter has had our own home to work on," he said. "We usually help out on projects that the Greater Columbus Habitat is already working on."

The house was donated by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, Flory said.

Executive Jet is helping to finance the $25,000 project, along with a large donation from the Columbus Foundation, he said.

A construction manager from the greater Columbus chapter is always on site to oversee the progress and help direct the students, Flory said.

The income of eligible partner families is from $8,500 to $17,800 annually, adjusted to family size, Flory said.

Habitat houses cost approximately $38,000 with a market value of $42,000-$46,000, and they are sold at no profit or interest to the partner families, he said.

In Columbus, mortgage payments for the houses run from $200-$240 per month for a 15-20 year mortgage which includes insurance, taxes, and maintenance escrow account, Flory said.

Families are chosen on the basis of housing need, ability to repay the loan, family size and willingness to help work on the house in partnership, he said.

Each family must provide labor on their own house as well as other Habitat homes or events.

John Pease gives a saw to Roger Baker, site construction manager, at the Habitat for Humanity project.

Flory said.

The number of hours is determined by the size of the house. Two hundred and fifty hours for two bedroom homes, 375 for three bedrooms, and 500 for four bedrooms, Flory said.

Families are not allowed to sell the house and make a profit for ten years, he said.

The house at Genesee Avenue will go to Janet Bohanan, who is a single mother of a 17-year-old daughter and a 7-year-old son, he said.

"I could have walked on water the day they told me I was approved for the house," Bohanan said.

"Tears just flowed from my eyes when I went to the house and saw that these students were working on weekends just to help me," she said.

The three-bedroom, two-bath house is scheduled to be finished by April, she said.