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Ohio State Students Help in Hurricane Recovery Efforts



In December, 30 Ohio State University students volunteered to clean up parts of South Louisiana ravaged by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

A group of 30 Ohio State University students arrived in Louisiana the week of December 11-17, ready to roll up their sleeves and pitch in to clean up parts of South Louisiana ravaged by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Landscape Horticulture students **Anna Leis**, **Nate Tschaenn** and **Aaron Heilers** joined the volunteer effort. "I decided to go because I saw the devastation on the news every night and thought it would be a great opportunity to do something worthwhile and help the people down there," explained Heilers. Leis echoed the same sentiment. "I wasn't sure that I wanted to give up an entire week of my Christmas break, but I knew that spending my time helping others would be more than worth it." Tschaenn saw no reason not to help, "It was the right thing to do."



In an attempt to restore a greenhouse, Ohio State horticulture student Aaron Heilers removes dead plants and cleans up debris.

Organized by the Collegiate Young Farmers, the Buckeye volunteers worked in Washington, St. Tammany and Plaquemines parishes, as well as the city of New Orleans, and performed projects ranging from general cleanup to helping farmers rebuild fences. At one nursery students were dumping dead azalea plants and they cleaned and stacked over 28,000 pots in one day. They also performed tasks for others like harvesting citrus fruit, cleaning up around houses and much more. "Most projects were related to agriculture. We

helped a few nurseries clean up by throwing out dead plants, planting new ones, and cleaning debris," explained Tschaenn. "We also picked oranges that growers were not able to harvest on their own due to the lack of labor and worked with the city park and botanical gardens of New Orleans to plant native irises and azeleas."



Landscape Horticulture student Anna Leis put her training to use by potting plugs for a local greenhouse damaged by the hurricanes.

For Leis the work was more than simply cleaning up debris. "The most rewarding part of my trip was seeing that while helping clean up people's lives, we were also able to help restore their hope." The work of removing debris from Talen's Landscaping provided owner Michael Talen with optimism for the future. "I heard him say, "Man, it's like a dream having you here to help us," Leis recalls. "It looked as if clouds were being removed from their eyes and they could finally see a path to recovery. They wanted to give us something to show their appreciation, but seeing their gratitude and the difference we made was more than enough."

Heilers appreciated serving people in need. "The most rewarding experience was seeing how much we helped the people. Just one days work by us put them ahead months if they would have had to do it themselves."



Horticulture student Nate Tschaenn helped a nursery by throwing out dead plants, planting new ones, and cleaning debris.

Plans for the students' visit began when **Dennis Hall**, an advisor of Collegiate Young Farmers, made contact with Louisiana officials and said he wanted to bring a work crew down to help with the cleanup. "One thing we hope that will come out of the relief effort is that students learn about the horrific devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita through personal experience of being there," said Hall. "The students arrived ready to pitch in wherever they were needed," said **Mark Schexnayder**, who heads the LSU AgCenter's Hurricane Katrina Task Force. "But before they arrived, I had

been coordinating with our agents in several parishes so we could make their time most valuable."

LSU AgCenter county agent **Alan Vaughn** of Plaquemines Parish said it was amazing to see what these students were doing in this time of need. "These students could be back in their hometowns enjoying their Christmas break, but they gave up a week of rest to come down here and work really hard," Vaughn said, adding, "We can't thank them enough."

Story by [Victor van Buchem](#). Photos courtesy Collegiate Young Farmers members.

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