

Hoosiers step forward to help

Hurricane Katrina serves as a sober reminder of the importance of our nation pulling together to help those in need.

Our strength and resilience as Americans, our industriousness, ingenuity and compassion are needed and required when a disaster of such magnitude hits — or, indeed, when smaller but no less tragic catastrophes hit our own hometowns.

It has been remarkable to see the outpouring of support from around the nation for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. And not surprisingly, Hoosiers are stepping forward to help lead in this effort.

In Shelbyville, on a parking lot off of Harrison Street, a hard-working group of volunteers spent Labor Day weekend answering the call of service. Members of our community rallied to fill at least three large semitrailers full of donations for hurricane victims.

Representatives from Ryobi Die Casting (USA) Inc., the Shelby County Chamber of Commerce and Martin Estates have joined in the effort with a plan to reach out to victims of the natural disaster by offering jobs in the local industries around Shelby County.

On behalf of our community, I would like to thank these local heroes for their willingness to step forward in this time of national crisis.

Recently, Gov. Mitch Daniels deployed Indiana's National Guard to assist Mississippi in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Led by the Adjunct General of Indiana, Major R. Martin Umbarger, the operation known as Task Force One is providing assistance in the form of transportation, medical services, security forces, logistical support and aviation resources.

Soldiers in the 638th Division Aviation Support Battalion and Aviation support personnel in the 2-238th Aviation Battalion from Shelbyville are currently dispatched to Camp Shelby, Miss., to provide relief.

Additional soldiers from the Columbus 113th Support Battalion were also dispatched. Company A, 205 Medical Battalion (Area Support Ambulance) from Camp Atterbury join our local heroes in providing recovery relief and medical support.

All together, Hoosier National Guard troops comprise 2,400 of the 9,000 troops currently stationed in lower Mississippi.

In addition to search-and-rescue efforts, Indiana National Guard units deliver ready-to-eat meals and fresh water to hurricane survivors, air-lift medical supplies, provide security and transportation to civilian volunteer organizations and build a temporary infrastructure through which rehabilitation can begin.



**LUKE
MESSER**

Other Indiana contributions to the relief effort include the work of Forestry Officers from the Department of Natural Resources, which cleared more than 75 trees in the parking lots of local schools to reopen the structures for class/shelters.

More than 20 officers from DNR and the Indiana State Police patrolled for looters, stray boats and victims in need of assistance. Working 12-hour shifts, the officers patrolled nine counties, provided security for food-relief missions and assisted the Biloxi (Miss.) Police Department with the evacuation of the city.

Indiana's medical-relief teams treated people at a Red Cross shelter, and the mental-health team saw 55 people working with a first-responder group.

Our Indiana state government continues to prepare for the possible relocation of evacuees from Hurricane Katrina. Indiana is currently home to an estimated 850 Katrina evacuees and has offered to house up to 3,000.

More evacuees continue to relocate to Indiana nearly every day. An estimated 180 registered with the American Red Cross on Tuesday.

The Indiana State Fairgrounds, working with the American Red Cross, is hosting approximately 85 evacuees and will serve as a temporary shelter and relocation center. Indiana has identified several hundred apartments and housing units for long-term housing of evacuees.

Additionally, the State Emergency Operations Center is organizing a dozen state agencies to assist evacuees with physical- and mental-health screenings, registration for unemployment, food, housing assistance and registration for federal and state assistance programs.

Many courageous Hoosiers are stepping forward to help the victims of Katrina. However, Federal and State officials are asking that Hoosiers interested in volunteering please not self-deploy.

Rather, if at all possible, volunteers should be coordinated through Indiana's Emergency Operations Center.

Anyone interested in volunteering should contact Indiana Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster to offer their services. INVOAD can be reached online at www.invoad.org or by calling (866) 909-4673.

Messer is executive director of the Indiana Republican Party and represents District 57, including most of Shelby County, in the Indiana House.