



Special Delivery

Hoosier lends his two hands, and 18 wheels, in effort to help hurricane-ravaged town



Jeff Riggen helps unload the rig (above) before the boom was brought in to unload pallets of supplies.

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Jeff Riggen didn't want to just sit in his Indiana home while people on the Gulf Coast were suffering. He wanted to help hurricane victims.

Hundreds of other Hoosiers did too, as it turned out.

With help from his sister-in-law — Star-Herald advertising director Cindi Compton — Riggen organized a drive to gather supplies in their hometown of Crawfordsville, then drove the tractor trailer 700 miles to the storm-ravaged region.

The rig was filled with items that were on victims' wish lists — non-perishable food items, water, toiletries, bedding, towels, cleaning supplies, laundry detergent, T-shirts, socks, work gloves and baby items. Random House of Crawfordsville donated a dozen skids loaded with clothes, canned foods, children's items, paint sets, books, blankets and sleeping bags. And the women of Waveland, Indiana — a town of about 400 just south of Crawfordsville — made 75 baby blankets for the mothers of Waveland, Mississippi.

Riggen said that he had seen the devastation on news reports, but that didn't prepare him for seeing it in person.

"Driving past what used to be the town's K-mart and finding tents where people are living will touch your soul like you never thought possible," he said. "When the media says that it looks like a war zone, they are making a huge understatement. The helplessness and bewilderment in the people's eyes would stop you in your tracks.

"They do have a sense of hope, and with each truckload of supplies, their spirits are lifted."

Riggen turned to his sister-in-law to help get the drive started.

"Jeff wanted to help from the very beginning but had no way of knowing where to start," Compton said.

So she contacted the Journal-Review in Crawfordsville and provided a wish list from Waveland, a town that was adopted by Kosciusko. The paper published the list and did a story. And the donations poured in.

"It was a great success," Compton said.

Riggen's employer, WoodMizer Products of Indianapolis, donated supplies, an 18-wheeler and expense money for his trip. He picked up Compton along the way, and they delivered the

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— JEFF RIGGEN



Top two photos: Two months after Hurricane Katrina struck, destruction is still everywhere in the Waveland-Bay St. Louis area. Above: A tent serves as Waveland's fire department.



Photos by Cindi Compton



The K-mart parking lot (above) has become home and a distribution center for many Waveland residents, while campers and RVs (below) are what the lucky ones are living in.



DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Recovery center set up in Forest, one coming to Kosciusko soon

From staff reports

Federal emergency Management Agency public relations officials made a brief stop in Kosciusko last week, saying that a mobile Disaster Recovery Center should be set up in Kosciusko in the next few weeks.

In the meantime, the nearest such center will be set up at the Forest Coliseum through Friday.

Those who have questions may visit a mobile center to meet with recovery specialists in person.

Disaster victims are urged to register for assistance before visiting one of the mobile centers by calling 1-800-621-FEMA (3362). The TTY number is 1-800-462-7585 for those who are speech- or hearing-impaired.

All DRCs — both at mobile and fixed sites

around the state — are open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday and closed Sundays until further notice.

Representatives of state, federal and volunteer agencies will also be on hand to answer questions and provide recovery information. Officials from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) will be available to discuss disaster loans for homeowners, renters and businesses of all sizes. Written materials about various assistance programs are also available to individuals and business owners.

FEMA officials said that 1,099 people have already registered for disaster assistance.

As of Oct. 28, FEMA had approved \$723.4 million to 499,811 Mississippians in 49 counties for home repairs, temporary housing, medical needs, moving and other expenses.