

DPP Students Return to New Orleans

For the second straight year, UConn DPP students traveled to New Orleans to help rebuild parts of the city devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The trip, which lasted from May 12th to May 20th, was sponsored and planned by the G.A.P.P.S. student organization headed by National Service Trip Committee Chair, Sarah Guggino and President, Holly Stocker. In total, 11 people volunteered to participate including DPP professor Thomas Craemer.

This year, the group chose to work in the Lower Ninth Ward because it was the community closest to the levy failures and rebuilding efforts in this area have been much slower than in other parts of the city.

While last year's group had a great experience working in the Upper Ninth Ward, this year's volunteers chose to work with Common Ground Relief, a grassroots organization founded by a resident of the Lower Ninth Ward.

"We felt that our work would be more directly related to the residents," said Sarah Guggino. "Because any work that we did was benefitting current residents of the property, not some future property owner."

Volunteers performed a wide range of tasks including scraping, sanding, painting, demolition, property clearing, and yard maintenance.

Many said that the most memorable and challenging project was the complete gutting of a home that had not been touched since the hurricane hit over two and a half years earlier. The home still had pictures, furniture, clothing and toys from the family that had lived there.

"We had to clear everything out wearing respirators and clothes that covered every inch of our body due to the mold and bacteria growing in the house," said Sarah.

DPP students also used the trip as an opportunity to speak with local residents and learn how public policy could help the city continue to recover. Volunteers found local residents to be very involved and receptive, and many were eager to share their stories and experiences.

"They were incredibly thankful to have us there helping out," said John Colonese, MPA '08. "But residents also really went out of their way to help us understand what they had been through and what challenges they continue to face today."

Five of this year's volunteers had participated in the first New Orleans service trip last year. "It was great to visit the homes we worked on last year and see the families living in the homes,"

said Barbara Rua, MPA '08. "We were able to see how successful our trip really was. It was very validating."

The G.A.P.P.S. Executive Board expects the National Service Trip to become an annual tradition for the Department of Public Policy, and planning has already begun for next year's trip.

For more information on G.A.P.P.S., please visit: dpp.uconn.edu/gapps

For more information on Common Ground Relief, please visit: commongroundrelief.org