

# Teacher works to rebuild schools

## Blevins helps in New Orleans

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COVENTRY — When you travel down to New Orleans and spend a couple weeks around the French Quarter these days, you get a different perspective on your life, said Mark Blevins, an English teacher at Coventry High School.

This summer, Blevins made his second trip to the area severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina with the American Federation of Teachers. Starting last summer, Blevins said, the federation organized three two-week sessions to bring teachers from across the country into the work of rebuilding houses, neighborhoods, and schools.

Staying six blocks from the French Quarter with 40 other teachers from across the country, Blevins said, he spent his time in the schools rebuilding, repainting, and repairing water damage.

“We did something we called ‘an extreme-classroom makeover,’” he said. “They gave us all sledgehammers and told us which walls needed to go.”

Last year, Blevins said, his team worked restoring houses and the area was very deserted. “New Orleans was a ghost town; there was no one down there — every house was abandoned, every house was vacant — and this was two years after the hurricane,” he said.

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# Teacher helps Katrina victims

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Now, three years after the storm, families are finally starting to repopulate the area, Blevins said, and it's time to get the schools ready for students again.

He got involved because he knew there was a need, Blevins said.

"You're doing a good thing; you're helping out your neighbor."

And with the satisfaction of good work came a change in perspective, he said.

"Everyone has problems, but you leave Coventry and you go

down to New Orleans and you realize that your life is not that bad."

Hearing the stories locals had to tell made the biggest impression on him, Blevins said. There were dozens of stories that he and the team heard daily.

"We talked to a man who was sitting on his roof for nine days during the flooding," Blevins said. "He got picked up by a boat and taken up in a helicopter that took him to Detroit. So there he is with no money, no cell phone, no way to contact his family. And there's a lot of people with sto-

ries like that."

The Coventry Teachers' Alliance has also gotten involved in the effort to help New Orleans, Blevins said. This week, he said, the alliance donated \$3,000 to help with aid work. The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals is donating school supplies to the New Orleans Public Schools, Blevins said.

Anyone who would like to help out can contact the United Teachers of New Orleans, 4650 Paris Ave., New Orleans, LA 70122, he said. The telephone number is 504-304-2160; the fax number is 504-304-2159.