

Dickinson College
Serve the World
New Orleans, LA.
March 11-19



Why do you go on these trips? It's a question that comes up all the time when we could be a myriad of other places spending spring break under the sun, near water, with our families, or in bed catching up on hours of sleep. The answer that I have heard you all say is it's about the service. But what about service? What makes you want to enjoy the sun on breaks while dry walling or finishing a house? What makes you enjoy walking on the streets of Bourbon and Royal but then visit Carver High School and see the inequalities in life so vividly? What makes you give up hours of sleep driving to New Orleans in Dickinson vans for 18 hours to work hard for a week of "vacation"?

It's about service, but it's more about just getting a good feeling. In reflections and conversation throughout the week the answers varied. Service provides opportunity to learn about ourselves and learn about others; to hear stories that are forever marked on our hearts by residents you served in five short days. Service is about coming together as team to help others without caring if we will ever "feel good," be thanked or know the recipients, or the task required. As I saw over and over throughout the trip, service was about journeying together to explore a new culture, provide hope to those we met, and learn about our peers who we never met before on campus but have a passion for service. It is also about learning about a city that continues to struggle to rebuild and some of the reasons.

We have come home, but the memories, pictures, and reflections will continue to remind us of this time in New Orleans, three and a half years after Katrina still in need of help, hope, and a hand-up. Twenty four students and four administrators traveled to New Orleans and experienced a culture of life, hope, community, and service. Thank you for going and serving. My greatest plea is, don't stop now. New Orleans and others closer here in Carlisle and your home community need people who are willing to serve. Each area needs people willing to speak out about injustice and inequality and work beside people who for a little while you can call a neighbor. What are you passionate about? Do it. Reach beyond your comfort zone. Listen to a neighbor. Share your stories. Engage the community and world through service...you will be changed. Read on, and find out how...

Sunday, March 13

Jessie Shaffner

It has always been a goal of mine to go to New Orleans and help with the rebuilding. I was too young to go down when it first happened so I did car washes to raise money to send down. Although I was interested in Katrina and New Orleans, today I found out I really knew nothing about the problems that persist. There have been tremendous strides in recovering over the years, but the region still isn't close to being "done." The most surprising part of this is a large part can be blamed on the New Orleans and the US government. The amount of loopholes, red tape, and corruption is really disheartening for me; all I can think is "how can the government for the people abandon them and put up boundaries to hinder their improvement?" It just seems like a crazy idea that people were given money based off an appraisal, and as a college freshman (without political experience) knows that is prejudice against the entire impoverished population.

It was so amazing to hear Jon talk about his journey in non-profit. I want to do a very similar job only internationally rather than in country. His passion for his job was evident in his description of the progress they have made. I really hope I can have a connection with my work in the future similar to that. Also, he made my dreams real for me. Most people I've talked to are in different types of non-profit so it was amazing to see where I could go with non-profit. On the other hand, his disappointment in the government was clear when he told the group it took a year and a half to get a grant through because someone forgot it was on their desk. I could definitely understand why. How can someone be so selfish as to forget something as important as another's livelihood?! It makes me feel that for "such a great role model country" US has a loooong way to go until we can actually put ourselves on this pedestal.

Tom and Jon talked a lot about how people move out of New Orleans and never come back because there is not much to return to. Although there are serious problems, I felt that the sense of community was overwhelming (and to me this is probably due to all of the problems, people feel they should bond together). From the Fleur-de-lis emblem everywhere, to the after effects of Mardi Gras, to the feeling in the neighborhoods it was very obvious to me the town is very much alive and proud. The Methodist Church, First Grace, is such a great example of this. There are not many places where three different churches can come together. The attitudes of the people don't stop amazing me. I just wish that more people can gain this with one another- it would fix many prevalent problems.

Visiting the French quarter was such an amazing experience. I have heard stories and descriptions but being there I wasn't expecting how great it was. I loved the architecture and history throughout the city. You could tell the people and culture are rooted in their history, which is cool they don't move on like other cities do. The people were so nice and their food was AMAZING!

Overall the experience was what I wanted- a combination of knowledge of Katrina and time to be in the culture. I already know I want to come back someday.

Yasmine Belaoura

Today was the first day I had ever been to New Orleans. I experienced so much that it's hard to believe that it all hit in one day. The flood tour was absolutely amazing. It gave us all some concrete context as to why we are here and what we can accomplish. Our tour guides, Jon and Tom were so insightful and helpful in our visit. What touched me most on the tour was a school in the first place and that after all this time it still hasn't been demolished and rebuilt is saddening. Going into the city of New Orleans was great. I absolutely loved it. The culture, the energy, the dynamics and all the people I was with made for our exceptional visit. I wish we could have more opportunities to go into the city.

Finally, I am very excited to get started in work tomorrow and to do some good where a lot of bad has been done. This trip has already been so uplifting and almost spiritual that I can't wait to see what's next.

Chuck Steel

Today's was a day of new experiences, both for those of us returning to Nola and those seeing it through fresh eyes. Not only are the bonds of friendship forming and becoming stronger through "assassin", meals and "surprise trust falls", we are also forming and strengthening our bonds with this place and its people. Those of us that have not experienced this place before are having their eyes opened to the broader issues which affect the area; and those which have been here before are delighting in seeing those eyes opened. Today I got to see my old friend Jon Skvarka again; while I enjoyed our meeting it was worrisome to see the strain in his views as the struggle to rebuild this city goes on and on. I can still detect a passion in him, though, which renews my hope. The new experiences of today and the eyes which are opening bring a new energy to this effort. My hope for this week is to see that energy build to a point that these young people can renew and redouble to work here and see it further on the road to a revitalized New Orleans.

Allison Murkowski

What an amazing first day in New Orleans! I had never been to a church service quite like the one at First Grace, but I was definitely amazed at the sense of community I felt, especially knowing that three churches had merged to form it. Everyone was so welcoming and the choir was unifying and moving.

I learned the most though from the tour that we took of the New Orleans area. Although I thought I had an idea about the damage due to Hurricane Katrina, I had no idea of the wide spread destruction. Reality hit home. Yes, some "modernized" houses had been built and levees were put up, but there is still so much left to do, even six years later. Untouched damaged houses,

with “Xs” on them indicating the number of dead bodies found, are still standing, waiting to be renovated. Roads still need to be repaired, and businesses need to move back into the local communities. The high school essentially hasn’t been touched and students are still learning temporarily mobile homes. What was reassuring though was the spirit of the neighborhood, a lady driving by stopped her car, opened the door, and told us she loved us. Other families played basketball outside in the lower 9th ward, despite run-down houses, dumpsters, and empty lots surrounding them. It makes me realize how truly fortunate I am.

The night in New Orleans couldn’t have been any more perfect: eating dinner outside with live music, nice weather, and good people; walking down Bourbon Street, experiencing the energy, colors, and sounds of the road; perusing the French market and buying souvenirs to help the economy; eating beignets (and the 250 lbs: of powdered sugar!) while the sun set; hanging out with everyone as we waited for the vans.

I’m looking forward to finally getting to the work site—I want to hear the home owner’s personal stories. And hopefully we can all inspire hope.

Kendra Haven

So much to reflect on today! Seeing an entirely new culture and an entirely new place always inspires a certain type of feeling. You can understand yourself in a different way after experiencing yourself in a different context. Our tours guides today told us to take ourselves out of the picture throughout the course of the week—maybe this removal will start tomorrow; for today, I couldn’t help noticing my change in perspective. Amidst the flooded homes with X’s on their walls, I am a middle class American who has never experienced disaster, who has never come home to a questionable death toll on my door. Walking through the city, I am a tourist experiencing vibrancy and a sense of life and culture previously unknown to me. As a volunteer in the Greater New Orleans area, I am a part of something huge, altruistic, and essential- but I am also very, very small. I had a wonderful day in the French quarter. I was so incredibly content, tasting spicy; jambalaya and getting to know a group of beautiful, passionate people.

Tomorrow, we start work! I’m really excited- bring on the work parts and the dry wall!

Monday, March 14th

Essence McDowell

Today was our very first work day. It felt good to finally make it to our site after orientation. The orientation was very insightful, I learned a lot about the area, and also reasons why these people are still having trouble rebuilding their homes. It was very uplifting to hear the expressed gratitude for the work of volunteers like ourselves. Once we got to our site, it was amazing to see that we would be finishing a house. The tiling was done, the walls were painted, and the

cabinets were up. I thought to myself how great it would be to meet the owner of the home. After rationing assignments amongst our group members, we all got straight to work. It was very cool that although this was the first time most of us had worked so closely with one another, we were all very willing to collectively get things done. Shanice and I got straight to the task of painting the doors from inside the house, outside. It was so exciting to paint the doors a very bright white. The sun was beautifully shining on us, and at some point the majority of our team was helping to paint doors. At lunch time, we all took a break from our different jobs and simply sat outside on the porch with our bagged lunches and box of chocolate chip cookies. It felt good that we were all able to come together as a team, and relax in the beautiful weather. It's awesome to have this great connection with people we'd typically hardly ever speak to. After lunch, we went back to the house. Right before it was time to go, we were lucky enough to meet the home owner and her brother. We learned that prior to the storm she had been living in that home for over 30 years. We also learned that her husband died shortly after Hurricane Katrina, and that her daughter lived right next door with her children. It was great to hear the liveliness in her voice after being ripped of something that belonged to her for such a long period of time. After only talking to her for a short amount of time I already felt a little more connected to her and the building of her house. It's such a new experience for me to be in this lovely city doing service because my past experiences here have all been personal and to see my family. Being on this trip, and doing this type of work has helped me realize more things about the culture of the city, and the sense of community amongst basically all of it's population. I really enjoyed bonding with my team today. After working at our site, we bought t-shirts and decorated them with our team name (Team Xtreme). That was a pretty awesome experience. Well, I'm hoping that the next few days on this trip will be just as great, if not better.

Mellissa Keebler

Wow- what a truly amazing experience, eye opening experience the past two days have been! This is my first trip to New Orleans, pre-or post- Katrina, and frankly I wasn't quite sure what to expect- what would the city look like, how far has the recovery progressed (six years later!) What would the resident's reactions be to us- I honestly don't know. I think at this point, the flood tour we went on yesterday, and the orientation we went to this morning has made the greatest impact on me. Obviously, I had read articles about Katrina and have seen the pictures but to actually stand on a foundation where a house once stood less than one hundred yards from the levee was like a punch in the gut. It was absolutely heart wrenching to stand there and look at a house across the street and see the "x" and the numbers spray painted on them and to know what it all meant. And what has been more shocking is hearing the stories of recovery and how long the process had been and continues to be. The gentleman leading orientation explained his personal story and that of the entire greater New Orleans area in such vivid detail, I felt like I could see those images myself. This introduction to the New Orleans area has really helped me to understand and prepare for the work that lies ahead this week. It was truly an amazing experience today to begin our team's work- dry wall and insulation in a one story brick home in a lovely neighborhood outside of the city. While it's easy to feel small in this huge ongoing effort, I hope everyone here on this trip is able to see the huge impact their one week of

work is making on the home owner and the area as a whole. I know that when we leave here, I will always think about the work we have done together and wonder if that home owner is able to walk in her house, her home, again because we all helped to make that a reality for her.

Kate Darrell

I don't think the day could have gone any better. It was our first day at our worksite and we were assigned to put in insulation and dry wall, which was a brand new experience for me. However, let me back up and talk about orientation because it was pretty different from your average speech about rules and courtesies. He told us about his own experience with Katrina and the challenges he and his family have had to face because of it. While his story showed so much hardship, his energy didn't and the way he spoke about the volunteers was so sincere and positive that it made me even more impatient to get working.

So after we got our tools and worksites, we hopped in the van and began the drive into the greater New Orleans area. Upon arrival, it didn't take two glances to know that this place needed a little of work. I worked on putting in insulation on the second floor, which wasn't hard work but boy did it get hot in there! Around lunch time, we were joined by the middle school volunteers Kevin likes to call "the terds". We closed up shop at 3:30 pm, but I was so astounded at how productive we were! The second floor is almost completely insulated, which is awesome! I absolutely can't wait for tomorrow, so I can continue with my awesome team to make this house wonderful for the owner.

One last thing that happened that truly touched me was how at the very end, when we were loading into the van to leave, a man walked up to us and began speaking. He asked who we were, told us how much he appreciated our efforts and asked us how he could get our help with some work on his house. It was so gratifying speaking to him, but at the same time it was a strong reminder of how many people still need help in New Orleans. We gave him the phone number for the organization we are working through before we left and I hope that that man gets the help he deserves. Overall, it was a fantastic day and I can't wait to do it again tomorrow!

Luigi Fu

Today was an interesting day because it was full of new experiences. I learned so much about building a house, about New Orleans, about my team and about myself. It was amazing to install insulation since I've never done it before. I was nervous that I couldn't be a useful member of this trip and group. The people that I have met have brightened my view of New Orleans. They just said hi to me even though I was a random stranger in their city. They knew that I was a volunteer but it still felt great being welcomed to a new city, especially when my city is not that generous.

Just being with my team and working with them felt like an amazing experience. We worked so well together, as though we knew each other for a long time. Today before entering the

worksite, I thought that we weren't going to be able to help the homeowners since one week was such a short time. Oh how I was wrong! Just seeing all of the insulations that we installed today and how much we achieved just proved me wrong. Now I know that we can achieve a lot, although not how much I wanted, but enough to have an effect. It was amazing to see all the work my team accomplished in one day and I can't wait until the end of the week.

Shanice Grant

Ok so I was told that I could write about anything that I wanted here, my question: Does lalalala count? I mean hey it is technically something right? On a more serious note. I am sitting in my first homeowner's back yard right now. The wind is constantly blowing and the sun is blazing as shines down upon us. The neighborhood is silent except for the little animals that could be heard scurrying about. Music can be heard loud and clear coming from my sight, along with laughter and the occasional tool sounds coming from within. It is beautiful here and different to an extreme as to where I feel as though the air smells differently. The place seems to have a sense of calm about it yet you can feel an undercurrent of restless energy surrounding the people waiting/binding its time until it can become unleashed. The silence in the community worries me though. To me it is not the same kind of silence that can be heard in Carlisle; the noise in Carlisle is still filled with noise and the awareness of untold amounts of people occupying one space, but in this community it is not like that. It is a hopeless/faithless type of silence, a silence filled with the knowledge that many of the people have given up and left. Hearing that eerie kind of silence made me feel helpless and began to register to me that no matter how much work I completed this week, it would not be enough; could never be enough.

My team is working rather quickly as we strive complete all of the finishing touches upon our home owners house so that she can move in as quickly as possible. Meeting her and her brother was such a wonderful experience for me and helped to draw an even stronger connection between myself and the house I wanted to complete. The ability to see her face and hear straight from her, what she wanted done to her house was very awe-inspiring to me. Team Xtreme is also forming a tighter bond and getting to know each other more is a fun experience for me. We are discovering a lot of things that we have in common and our crazy comments and random moments when we break out in to dancing are hilarious. I cannot fathom half the things that I am seeing here. The destruction surrounding the communities, the mix of emotions that travel across the faces of the NO people as they enter conversations with us was unbelievable. It makes me anxious and excited to see what else this week is going to bring.

Mari Furey

When I first got here I didn't know the details of Hurricane Katrina, I can now say that that is no longer the case. Yesterday we learned all about how the flood destroyed a lot of New Orleans, but today I realized why volunteers are dwindling here. Today we had orientations in the church where we are staying, and during that I learned a staggering statistic, that only a few relief organizations are still here and functioning and it blew me away. How could that be? Didn't people realize how bad things were? Then I took a step back and thought about how much I

knew about the situation here a week ago and I started to get an idea of how the problems here can be forgotten. This idea was further reinforced when I saw a street full of houses and that looked fine and I briefly questioned if working here would be the best use of time. Then I went inside the house. Although the outside looked good the house was only partially dry-walled and insulated and I realized how much work would have to be done to make the house livable again. During our lunch break I went outside again and took another look at the neighborhood and I began to really see the state of the neighborhood. Some houses I realized were under construction and probably didn't have a complete inside like the one I was working on.

But what was worse was that a few of the houses that looked the most pristine and complete had faded spray paint X's still on their houses and then it hit me. It all hit me, how extensive and dangerous the floods were and how people could think that New Orleans wasn't in a state of emergency any more. The city of New Orleans is functioning but that is all people see. They see the French quarter, and that new levees are up and that the exterior of houses look nice and assume that everything is almost back to the way it was. But people aren't stopping to look at the faded X's on houses, looking to see if houses with acceptable exteriors have a livable exterior, they just see that the city is functioning. I'll be honest that really was all I saw until I got here two days ago, but now I actually know and see the state of this city and it breaks my heart. We are dealing with a lot of heavy stuff and situations here but this great group of people make it a lot easier to bear. We all understand the magnitude of their problems that plague this city and we can work hard all day to try and help but we can also put that behind us once we leave our worksite and enjoy New Orleans for what it is today and can enjoy each other. Right now as I am writing this I can hear laughter from the entire group while playing ninja. It is just that kind of amazing mix of fun and making a change with an amazing group of people that I think this trip is all about. I know we can't fix all the New Orleans problems in one week, especially the ones that predate Katrina, but I can now say that I truly see New Orleans and all the help it still needs and I'll never forget that. I can only hope that as long as people keep truly seeing New Orleans and volunteering will continue and the city will receive all the help in needs and deserves.

Tuesday, March 15th

Martin Navarrete

Coming down to New Orleans for the second time provided me with invaluable perspective. During reflection, everyone who had come down for the first time talked about a reality check, but coming down for a second time, especially after doing the research I've done, confirmed that this is now part of my reality. What I found to be disappointing, however, was how disenchanted Jon and Tan seemed to be with the overall situation in New Orleans. I obviously understand that the situation is dire, but there was a sense of hopelessness and a sense of impossibility to correct or fix anything that came across in their message. It seems that they both felt the cycle of poverty is impossible to break. But when does realism become pessimism? Or perhaps when does optimism become naivety?

I had a few more questions that came up as the day went on. How do we get people to pay attention to New Orleans again? How can we get them to come down and volunteer in the numbers that we've seen in the first 5 years post- Katrina? What's the most important step to start on at this point: education? Finishing homes? Bureaucracy? Medical care? Where else in the country is this a problem and how can we take measures now so that it doesn't take a disaster like Katrina to start to fix these problems elsewhere?

Jeanne Muller

Yesterday's reflection question was "what image has struck you the most so far on this trip?" While I've seen and experienced so many new things (in only a few days!) already, what has affected me a lot is a small corner of the house my team and I are working on. The home is very cozy looking. The homeowner Joanne will live in the half we're working on, and her daughter occupies the other half. The house exterior is a light sea foam green with very light yellow trim. The roof is peculiar; it has a very steep and curving peak. It's the kind of house you'd see in candyland or some other imaginary world.

The inside looks almost finished. Just today, Essence and Shanice finished painting all the doors and Martin and Drew put up all the blinds. Caity, Sophie, Nicki, Christina, and I have been spending most of our time sealing cracks and painting trim. But in the back room, what I imagine will be Joanne's bedroom, there are several gray water-stains on the side board.

When Ken came by yesterday he told us that rainwater had probably seeped through the tiny cracks around the window and caused the damage. We would have to seal all those miniscule cracks to prevent more water from getting in.

The stains were inconsequential and easily painted over. But they upset me so much because I imagined that water and that flaw in the building that let the water in as reflective of the larger tragedy that brought us here. Maybe it's a stretch to compare these to the flooding and the broken levees of 2005. However, I think it scared me a lot. A house should protect against the water. We must protect against the water.

The water stains also made me realize how crucial our work was. Calking cracks may be long and frustrating and seemingly small in relation to putting up dry wall, but it is important.

Today Christina sat on the tin roof of the awning and sealed the windows. I painted over the water stains on the trim. I hope Joanne stays dry and that she never has to put a bucket in her room to catch falling drops, or rags on her floor to mop a puddle of water.

Picture:

I dream...

Of

TEAM EXTREME

Christina Mullen

Today was a rough day. The work really affected everyone on my team and we were all mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted. It felt bad to not be able to motivate my team because I was feeling particularly grumpy myself. But they were great – they all helped pick me up and get me back on my feet again.

We found out today that we wouldn't be able to finish the porch and railings. This was a huge blow to the team, especially because it's the last step to making her house completely finished. She, her brother, and her daughter were all expecting to have this porch done. I'm dreading having to tell the homeowner that we won't be able to finish this last task for her. I have the idea that our team can reunite and go down this summer to finish her porch on our own. Hopefully this will work out and we can give her the gift of a completed house.

Liz Stuhr

It's hard to concentrate on writing this journal entry because of all the commotion and laughter, not to paint it as a hinderance but rather as a reflection of the great group dynamic we have. After four full days together traveling and working, everyone is becoming much more comfortable with one another, and with the different personalities we have in this group there's never a dull moment.

My team in particular had a good day. It started out frustrating with sheet rocking the ceiling. I was slightly removed from the situation since Megan and I formed team insulate, completely finishing a living/family room and 1 ½ bathrooms. I inhaled a good amount of fiber glass and my arms sparkle in the sun, but it's all for a good cause. The team succeeded in hanging the very difficult piece of sheet rock after four horses, numerous failed attempts, and a lot of help from Jim's expertise. We're moving a lot faster now and have been working really well together.

The most challenging and heart breaking aspect this week for me has been finding and looking through this pile of flood damaged pictures found at our site. Since our house is basically studs and insulation, a blank slate, and the chances of meeting our home owner slim, it's much easier to remove yourself emotionally from the work were doing. In seeing the pictures, those that were so damaged that it's just blobs of color or entire stacks stuck together to the polaroids that survived with babies, families, pets, that brings to the forefront the personal aspect of what we're doing. I'm not a person who likes to get all mushy and emotional, so I'll end here. – Maybe Saturday.

But overall, great day.

Nathan Toews

So this is now my third spring break in N.O.L.A working on homes. I'm confused about how I should feel about that. I'm happy to be helping and sharing new experiences with new people. Its always great to witness people's eyes being opened to a new aspect of the world. The amazing work we accomplish on these trips is undeniable and the life experience gained is unmatched. Yet, there's another side to this. Three years have passed for me, nearly 6 for NOLA and there is still so much that needs to be done. It's hard to think it will really ever be fixed. The problems are evolving into newer and harder problems to which there don't seem to be solutions. It's very disheartening. I still have hope though, because we are still coming back and new people are still learning about the tragedies here. Something that has surprised me is my own shift in attitude. I still love doing all the physical, and hard work and getting bruised, dirty, and sore, but I'm not confused on it all quite as much anymore. Part of it may be due to my change in responsibilities, but I find myself spending more time pushing others around me to try new things. I'm getting so much satisfaction from seeing newer people on the worksite trying new things. This is Allison's first STW trip, but you'd never know it. I love it. Not only are they on top of the labor, but everyone really seems to grasp and want to know more about the "bigger picture." I've participated in a few great discussions and over-heard others regarding many aspects of NOLA. I hope it continues and that reflections continue to be engaging.

Nicki Redmond

Today we finished at our first house, and it was definitely bittersweet. We were putting the finishing touches on the house, and the work was so detail-oriented that it made it really easy to spot things that were not completely finished the way we would like. We knew we were the last team coming through the house which made it especially difficult when Mira came and we had to leave. I am really proud of the work we did at the house – I know our team worked on the house as if it were their own.

After we finished up at the first house, we went to help Allison's team with a house that had been gutted. I'll admit that I was nervous about how it would work out when we joined the two teams together. Team Xtreme made a really strong bond working at the last house, and I was afraid we wouldn't mesh well with the new group. Thankfully, I couldn't have been more wrong. Allison and Kendra did a great job of showing us how to put up the insulation, and we were actually able to do some work before we left.

I am thankful that we had the opportunity to work on two completely different stages of a house. One of the coolest things about this experience is sharing a connection with the other volunteers who worked (and will work) on our houses. As much as I wonder about the families who used to live in the houses, I also wonder about the volunteers who helped rebuild them.

Michele St. Julien

Today was my second work day with my team (Team Deliciousness ☺) and I enjoyed both the work that we did and the time spent together. It was a much better day than yesterday because I was generally in a better mood and a lot less tired. Yesterday, I was in a weird place... I was wondering whether or not I was being open enough to bond with them. Usually, in new groups of people, I have a tendency to be shy and quiet... I'd rather observe those around me in order to obtain a better perspective of their behavior, attitudes and generally who they are. Basically, I become introverted until I feel comfortable enough to openly express myself and communicate. On the other hand, I also tend to gravitate to my comfort zone (i.e. people who I came here knowing already). I was worried that I was not extending myself enough to new crowds of people. I am eager to either create or disorder a space in which I can have a real conversation with someone who I have not really spoken to while being here.

On another note, I am increasingly becoming more aware of who I am and what I hope to gain from this trip. Having gone through a similar experience as Hurricane Katrina when the devastating earthquake hit Haiti, my homeland country, I went through a period of emotional detachment. I did not want believe in the terror and pain that had befallen the homes of my family in Haiti not the innocent residents of New Orleans. I struggled with allowing myself to feel the hurt and frustration of the people of New Orleans. However, I realized that it is difficult to be in the personal space of real human lives and not wonder about the past and what shall happen in the future. It was a heavy feeling that came upon me when I thought about the living conditions that predated the storm. While certain pre-existing circumstances were unbelievable, I know that there had to be people who are comfortable with where they were at in life. I cannot imagine losing that sense of security and comfort in a matter of hours. It is daunting to realize that no matter how much rebuilding takes place or to how many locations prior residents move, a new house will never be the home that you once knew. However, I am confident that the work we are doing here is significant and will make a difference. I had a great day with my team and I feel that we are growing more comfortable with each other. I like that we all have sense of humor and can laugh through our frustrations. I am optimistic about the next few days and just hope that we accomplish as much as we can!

Jamie Bugle

Today was our second day of work on our house. I was hoping that we would have gotten the kinks out of system for putting up the drywall/ sheetrock on the ceiling but we got off to a slow start and then devised a new system that required us to work the kinks out as well. We are definitely working hard but I guess I feel like I can't see the progress moving as quickly as I would hope. I knew coming into this we wouldn't finish a house in a week but it is frustrating knowing all the hours we put in will only make a small impact. My sense of urgency also increased today because we met a family member of the owner of the house and she told us the owner was older and sick and wanted to live in her house again before she died. I know the house probably won't be finished for at least a year realistically, but I hope the owner has a chance to move back in. Meeting the neighbor relative today was great though and I heard

someone's story about the hurricane first hand for the first time which was emotional for my team and I. On that note, I feel our reflections are really involving more emotion and generating more discussion than they were at the beginning of the trip. This is all very exhausting physically and emotionally but so worth it. The teams are bonding, everyone has fun and I relax after and during work and I have learned so many new games (I just got killed in assassin, ugh) and haven't laughed more in a long time. The weather was so good today, the sky was so blue and I can't wait to wake up in the morning for another beautiful day. After work I went on a run with Megan and Allison and as Allison said it was "freeing" to sweat out all the work day in and day out. I am surprised, and impressed by the people of New Orleans and respect them all so much. I thought I was an optimistic person but, comparatively I can still learn so much.

Mira Hewlett

It is great to be back in New Orleans and see the progress in the past year. The most vivid space was the lower 9th ward. A year ago it was blank space with just a few of the new Make it Right homes. They stood out and were symbols. But today they are a part of a community. That area now is covered with over 50 homes and there are blocks starting to form. It was an area the people were moving back into and is reforming but it's been 5.5 years. A long time, but not something to give up on is home.

An interesting conversation this morning was with Linda-the cleaning lady at Aldersgate. She shared her story and asked for any "leftovers" we might have at the end of our week. As I reflect on this I have mixed emotions of wanting to help and also wanting to make sure she is not taking advantage of her position and closeness to volunteers. As I heard her story, she shared the struggles of her daughter, and five grandchildren. Due to the stress of life since Katrina, her daughter's marriage has failed and Linda now helps care for and support the grandkids. Too often we can see the physical needs of rebuilding and deem everything "done". Yet things on the emotional side often take much longer and are harder to check off "done."

As we continue to come to New Orleans year after year (year 5 spring break here) I am reminded the work is far from done. Areas remain in need. People still are fragile. Coming back brings hope that people still remember and people still care.

I pray this team can take this message home and share the stories, people and experience of New Orleans. And that we each inspire others to share hope with all we meet.

Wednesday March 16th

Sophie Paxton

The past couple days have made such a huge impact on me that it's almost hard to process it all.

Today we finished up our work on the inside of Joanne's home. It truly looked beautiful when we left: the wall, the baseboards, the blinds; our hard work really did make the house look finished. It was bittersweet to leave. Not only because I think all of us felt an attachment to our work site, but also because we left feeling like the work was uncompleted. Having the supplies and time to do the work on the porch but being told that we had to work elsewhere was heartbreaking. It makes me feel sick to think of her having to live there with no knowledge of or when it will be completed.

Caity and I took a walk around the neighborhood this morning. I had spotted a Banksy piece on one of the houses down the street and we wanted to take pictures and walk around to look at more houses in the area.

It was incredibly difficult going into some of the abandoned houses. Not only were the homes beautiful, but also unlivable. There were slews of personal objects left behind: a TV remote in a front lawn, peeling linoleum still on the floor, a medicine cabinet still holding supplies in a shed. It really sort of hit me in that moment that people literally left six years ago and never came back because there was nothing to come back to. I can't begin to imagine how it would feel to have my home ruined and my things swept away. I'm not sure I'd have the strength to come back and start over there.

All in all, though, New Orleans is one of the most gorgeous cities I've ever been in, despite the devastating damage. And it's not just gorgeous because of the architecture and weather, but just the general vibe of the city and the pride and resilience of the people here. The feeling is tangible and despite the tragedy that they have suffered through, I've never met friendlier people.

The constant joy and enthusiasm of Team Xtreme makes the work and the difficult emotions I'm dealing with so much fun. I've never bonded so quickly with a group of people before. They are all so wonderful and lovely and I can't wait for the rest of the week with them. Tonight we were discussing how horrible we feel about the uncompleted porch and we all discussed how much we would like to come back this summer and finish it for her. I hope it happens, not just for Joanne, but for us. I know I can't return back to a time where New Orleans was out of sight, or out of mind. There is so much work to be done here and so many people to meet. I have to come back.

Xtreme Love

Caity Flanagan

I'm haunted by all the different images I've seen while in New Orleans. The first day it was the Lower 9th Ward and then the contrast to it when I saw the French Quarter. The second day it was our house and the surrounding neighborhood, the X's and the shift between the houses that have been rebuilt and the ones that are still destroyed. Today I went on a walk with Sophie and the image stuck in my mind was my discovery of the personal objects still scattered across yards and houses that have been untouched in six years. We explored some abandoned sights and houses around where we were walking and finding clocks, stockings, a remote, and chandelier, all made the sight seem intimate, yet anonymous. While all these images upset me, there was such a beauty to it all. On the walk Sophie and I found a Banksy piece spray painted onto an abandoned house. Encountering art in such an unusual place was so inspiring to me. The high school, the tagged projects, and the Banksy piece, all spoke of the spirit and beauty of this place. I never thought I could fall in love with a place or people so quickly but I have. Being down here has changed what I want to do with my life completely. After I graduate I plan on coming back to New Orleans and working. I was talking to Kevin about my plans last night. I want to give the youth here an outlet through art. I am in love with the street art here, the graffiti and tags speak so much about this place. I want youth to be able to let out all that they have experienced and to use art to express it. I want them to decorate their schools, the streets, the abandoned homes that they see every day. I want them to reflect on who they are. This is just one of the many ideas that I have. Speaking of my talk with Kevin last night, I had such a great time talking to him. One of the things that I love the most about this trip is that I have gotten to know and open up to so many new people. Kevin and I talked about so much from both of our reasons for being on the trip, our parents/families, and so many other things. I've loved bonding with everyone on this trip. This trip has been and meant so much more to me than I could ever imagine. I am thankful to have had this opportunity and I know that its effects will continue for such a long time. I will never forget anything about this trip.

Go Team Xtreme

David Torres

These trips never cease to amaze me. This is my second trip with Serve the World and I feel like I get more out of it than what I put in because I grow so much as a person and learn new things about myself. All of you have been incredible and will always have a special place in my heart. I believe it takes a special kind of person to give up their spring break and do something for others. I mentioned this during my reflection today, I know this trip has been wearing on us in many different respects. As I write this Christina is talking about her frustration and not being able to finish the house the way it deserves to be done. I can relate because my team won't see the project finished but I want to remind everyone that what we did here is something amazing. Everything from coming together as teams to cook, build, and most importantly have fun. I know all of you will continue to do amazing things with your lives and to help others.

I feel like I cannot accurately reflect on my experience today because there are so many emotions and experiences to process that it is impossible to do. So a few hours after I've lived them. To this day, I continue to reflect on my trip to Guatemala and I'm sure New Orleans will be the same. I know that I've learned so much from each and every one of you from either talking to you personally or hearing your amazing reflections or working on a construction project with you on site. Thank You. To everyone, (Admins, leaders and volunteers) Keep doing your thing and keep your head up. You're all amazing and I love you. p.s I love hearing all of you laugh and loved all of your jokes.

Colleen Berger

I can't believe it's Wednesday already. It feels as though just yesterday we were walking into our house with its bare walls. Time has flown by. For the most part we've figured out all the kinks in the process and we're finally getting a system down. Luigi and I finished 2 bedrooms today and we've moved into the hallway, which will become difficult tomorrow. Despite our occasional disagreement we still joke around and laugh together. And then there's Evan always trying to play the peacekeeper. Most of the time it doesn't work but we love him anyway.

It's hard though working in a big house. The team really gets split up a lot and we end up working on projects all over the house that separate us and any kind of conversation we might have while working. In a way I think we are missing something that maybe the other teams have but we are still bonding in so many ways and it's great. Sometimes it's hard though, I think, to get to know people on other teams. We don't see each other during the day because we're on different worksites. And then a lot of the times when we are back at the church I sometimes feel like the teams dominate the whole group and it becomes hard to talk to people. But it's just a small thing and everyone is still awesome.

I've been struggling with this all week but it's hard for me working where we are because we don't get to meet the homeowner, even if we do get to meet the sister and neighbor. It's great that we met her sister but it's not the same. On almost all the previous service trips I've been there on site almost every day. For me it's hard that I can't put a face and a person to the home I'm putting so much effort into. (Not that I would put any less in otherwise.) I just feel like I'm missing that personal connection and I think my team is also beginning to feel it. It's also really hard when this woman's personal belonging and memories are right next to where we're working. You can't help but occasionally look through the pictures and other things. It's definitely a new experience for me and its extremely challenging because I really cherish that personal connection. I hope that when I walk away from this trip I can learn how to work without this connection and to improve the relationships of my teammates instead of going back missing something I can't change.

Aline Bros

Touché day

Like all the other days in this service trip, this day was a great day. Of course, I don't make such huge discoveries as my first fast food dinner on a daily basis- for the record, a burger and French fries at a Burger King in the middle of Virginia. But I keep learning more and more every day, making a moment out of every single period of time.

My biggest challenge here is dealing with unknown words especially regarding building lingo and joke slang. Though, thanks to everyone's help and patience, I understood it better and better every day. Among other words I learned today. I will particularly remember "touché" which popped up while we were working, Kendra, Chuck, Nathan and I. For the first time since we have been working in this house I've had a closer look today at the "insulation team" work today. The working atmosphere in the second floor is unique, with Luigi and Colleen being so funny arguing details, and Evan complaining to this scene, trying to bring those back to peaceful conversations.

Team "love me, tender" is awesome. We have very interesting conversations and good time together. I appreciate everyone's effort and involvement in everything that we do and plan.

I can't wait to see all the work that will be done tomorrow in the house with Team Xtreme joining us!

Kevin Trinchere

Wow, 1:30 am really crept up on me. I feel like today has been the best day of the trip so far. Yesterday, I was physically and mentally drained. I found myself blaming myself for our team's mistakes and I felt that I have been letting them down with each mistake that occurred. After a meditation to relax a bit, I decided to go for a walk. I was so happy that Kendra wanted to keep me company because we ended up having a very good conversation about life in general and she helped me have a new view point for the frustrations at the work site.

With this advice in mind, I was ready for a new day. After we followed Marco Andretti- I mean Martin- we got to drop off team x-treme to their site and check it out. I was very impressed with their work and could tell they all had nice caulk skills. Also, we got to listen to the morning check in on Power 102.9, which we hope to be on tomorrow.

At the site, the day started off with the bucket of drill batteries filled with water and a piece of dry wall that we worked so hard on broke. Instead of getting upset, I looked and saw Jessie and Meg laughing hysterically, which would continue to happen with every other mistake in the day. Toward the end of the day, I took a step back and saw an amazing and inspiring site. Meg, Liz, Mari, and Jessie were doing a fantastic job putting up walls while Jasmine and Michelle were doing the pain staking task of putting the narrow ceiling parts up. Dave and Mellissa were working with me doing a large piece of ceiling with notch and vent cut outs. To see everyone

working hard and with such passion was truly inspirational, and it makes me want to work that much harder.

We worked on our team cups/ mugs today after a delicious dinner and crepes!! It was fun to see everyone's creative ideas and all of the cups looked fantastic. It was so determined to finish mine that I stayed up very late (and I even started Jim's cup). I am so glad I did this because I got to have a great conversation with Caity, whom I haven't gotten to bond with a lot so far. After talking with her and messing up my mug for a 5th time- go figure. I feel really close to her and I was truly in awe when she told me her aspirations of using street art to let kids of Nola express themselves and claim what is rightfully theirs on gutted buildings etc. I created an image of this in my mind, and I strongly believe that Caity can make this happen because she can be driven by this intense passion. Ugh, its 1:50 now, I need to sleep. I just wanted to let everyone know that out of all the service trips I have done, I have never been more impressed with the responses and how deeply everyone is understanding the many situations we are dealing with in this wonderful city. Also, I think we set a record for "that's what she said" comments today! Great job!

Thursday, March 17th

Drew Robinson

The trip is winding down now as we only have half a work day left before we make the long trip back to Dickinson. Like most of life, this trip went by ridiculously fast. I'm saddened and frankly overwhelmed at the prospect of all the work that awaits me back at school, but I know I made the right decision in throwing myself fully into this experience rather than working on papers and reading on the side.

A strong focus of this trip has been actively reflecting on our experiences. While I believe this is a valuable activity, something I have learned is how the most valuable reflections have come after much time has passed. It can take weeks, months, and even years to learn all the lessons from one specific trip or experience. I'm sure that my reflections of this trip will continue to grow and change as time distances itself from this moment.

As for now, I have a lot to reflect on from the past few days. Perhaps the most memorable experience is seeing the possessions of our homeowner in the attic yesterday. It was almost an eerie experience, but truly I can't communicate exactly how I felt at seeing those random belongings in the attic of an incomplete house. Ultimately it was a motivator to work on the house so those possessions can be moved out of the attic and into a completed house.

Something I also have thought of is how fortunate we are to be able to go on a trip like this. The ability to serve others, while being able to get to know my peers better has been amazing. Truly, the people have made this experience. While we all live hectic lives, this trip has been a great reminder of the value in setting everything aside and simply chilling with people. I'd keep going, but I'd rather live what I'm writing; lots of people plan to stay up late, enjoying the last night here with others.

Chuck Steel

Trying to be clever while hanging dry wall
I tipped the lift and watched the gypsum fall.
To the floor it crashed with a resounding sound
Raising cries of concern from those around.
“Is everyone alive” I heard them ask,
While I dismayed at the progress of our task.
For despite all our efforts on this day
A completed ceiling was even further away.
“Merry Christmas” I said and tried to smile,
The frustration and tension we tried to beguile.
Soon there appeared young men on mission
And they took pity on our poor condition.
Tools and knowledge with them they brought
And soon our hearts were less distraught.
Despite our spirits in the morning reeling
We soon had drywall attached to the ceiling!
Laughter was heard throughout the house
And none of us were uttering a sigh or grouse.
The rest of the team putting up insulation
Was able to join in our jubilation.
Beneath their goggles and their masks
They had all been working at their tasks.
Their efforts this week should receive their due.
Since now we can see that this house is really two
Throughout this week we have had our fun

And will all be sad when the voyage is done,
So at the close of the day this poem I render.
And think fondly on Team Love Me Tender.

Allison Murawski

Our worksite was so energized today. I am so thankful that Christina's team joined us yesterday. So much progress has been made and I am so excited to finish insulating the house tomorrow. I mean, it's nice that our three groups had three different sites initially, but I can't help but imagine how much progress could be made on one house if all three groups worked on it. I keep replaying my conversation with the homeowner's sister in my mind, and she is just so passionate about the house. It is her dream to have the house finished before her ill 80-year-old mother passes away, because her mother also loves the house. If all three groups worked on this house the mother would be able to move in probably a week sooner.

What I won't miss about the trip: having to drive 5 minutes just to go to the bathroom. Burger Kind's bathrooms are disgusting, but the car rides there have always been fun. Our team has grown so close over the past week, and we've really bonded over our snack and lunch breaks. My favorite moments though are when all 29 of us are eating dinner outside as the sun is setting. I love listening and talking to everyone—our group dynamic has changed so much since our Thursday meetings prior to the trip.

So there is one more day left and then 18 hours until we get back to Dickinson. I definitely am not ready to leave. Too much is left unfinished and I feel like I haven't done enough/could do so much more. Great experience, though!

Yasmine Belaoura

Today was an amazing day of work. We have made so much progress and it's a shame to realize that it's our last full day of work because we have gotten so much better at a lot of things such as the walling. We also got to talk to Ken who I believe is a volunteer contractor. He told us about the homeowner and how the neighborhood was impacted by the flood. One of my questions was why she had decided to rebuild now after six years. Apparently money wasn't a problem because she had saved up the insurance money but was not emotionally able to until now when she got into contact with the Epworth Project. But other people were not as fortunate in regards to the insurance money. He gave us a few examples. This old lady was not aware that she was entitled to government money. However her daughter was aware of that and wasted it on gambling and other things. So, when the old lady realized that she could get that money, she went to ask for it and she found out that her daughter had used it up. Other than the small sad interlude with Ken's stories the day was wonderful. It is always so much fun having dinner outside in the sun, playing games with each other, listening to everybody's

reflection on the day and giving my own, making team glasses with my team, and cooking dinner. I will take all of these things back from this trip along with much more. Also, I will take back a love for the beautiful city of New Orleans.

Essence McDowell

Today is Thursday, our first full work day at our new site with Allison's team. It was great working with the other team doing work a lot different than what we were used to. I did insulation for majority of the work day. My team and I got so much work done in a very short amount of time. Although the fiber glass was really annoying to work with, it felt good to complete something I have never done. Prior to actually doing work with insulation, I thought it was going to be really challenging, but the feeling of finishing outweighed that initial fear, on the work site, I worked very closely with my team members that were also insulating. It felt great to see the obvious dedication to the work being done. This in itself was enough to remain motivated to keep working harder. It felt good to know that everyone was feeling just as exhausted as I was. Several of my team members weren't feeling very well, including me. Speaking for myself, I felt very weak and light headed. It was great that when each of us felt sickly, Nicki was right there telling us to take a break and relax. This gesture showed that she truly cares. This is something I've noticed with everyone. In a short period of time, we've been able to bond with one another. Today's reflection was amazing, as always. However, today I pointed out large number of highs opposed to lows, and how much more comfortable people are.

I can honestly say that out of all the times that I've been to New Orleans, this was the greatest experience! I've enjoyed getting to know new people, and simply the many benefits of having gone this trip. The commitment to service is incredible. It's great to see a group of people with similar interests. I've also enjoyed working to make someone else very happy, even if we won't be around to share the joy with them. The most rewarding aspect of being on this trip is that in the long run, someone will be able to walk in their home at the end of the day, and be able to TRULY relax.

This trip has created so many beautiful memories, may they continue, and may we all continue to walk in our rightful paths.

Love you all

Michele St. Julien

I really enjoy my team and I think that as the days have gone by, we have gotten so much better at working with each other and getting things done. I could not have asked for a more successful day!

Today, we were finally able to receive some background information on the prior home owners of the house that we are working on. I've been waiting to learn the story of the home and I am

relieved that the home owners are alive and well and living in Oklahoma. The family intends to move back to their old homes as soon as it finished, which makes me feel so purposeful and encouraged. I only hope that the work we are doing is to the best of our ability and that something great comes out of it. I would love to see the end result of our collaborated hard work.

The situation in New Orleans is one that I am all too familiar with. I have witnessed, read and researched so many similar issues in various locations that it has disheartened me to a point that I am numb with emotion. I no longer want to talk and reflect about the many prejudice and problematic situations that exist. I want to spread the word and act. The struggle is not over and it may never be, but we will never know if we stop trying. I hope everyone feels a sense of enlightenment and duty as they leave this journey behind and prepare to embark on new ones. I know that I learned a lot but I tend to take experiences like this one in doses, therefore I have much more reflection to partake in even when I am back on Dickinson campus.

I am ready to get as much done as possible tomorrow and I hope that I feel satisfied with the job that we've done.

Kendra Haven

Today was our last full day of work. I can't believe we leave tomorrow – but at the same time, I always knew that this trip was going to go by extraordinarily fast. The first night in New Orleans, when we were all waiting for the vans at the city steps already seems so long ago.

I came on this trip because I wanted something in me to change. I wanted to make change, through change. I was talking with Kevin about how rare it is to experience that win-win situation: there is something so beautiful about changing and growing through giving. The only places I've found that exchange before are through writing and singing. So now it is time to consider if, how, or what I have experienced is change. I had my doubts about community service before I came here, to be honest. I thought things like, couldn't we just donate all the fundraising money (gas, food, lodging money) to the organization, and actually help out homeowners MORE this way? Does it really make the most sense to drive 17 hours to work for 4.5 days and then to travel 17 hours back? I saw service as something surface-level; something that puts band-aids over wounds rather than something that attacks a problem at its roots.

Here is what I found: there is NOTHING surface level about one hundred hands working together to put a roof over the head of someone who lost his family. There is NOTHING surface-level about giving a neighborhood a second chance. There is NOTHING surface-level about the pride of a daughter who wants to see her mother move back into her home of 30 years before she passes.

There is honestly nothing surface-level about what we've done this week, and there is something deep and lasting about the relationships we have formed while doing it.

Thanks Serve-the-world!

LOVE.

Friday, March 18th

Luigi Fu

It was the last day on our work site and all the groups were trying to finish whatever project they were working on during the whole week. For me, it was finishing all the insulation, mostly the ceiling insulation that Colleen and I were working on. To make sure that we got all this work done, Team Love Me Tender decided to leave for our worksite earlier than usual at 7:30 AM. This meant that each team member had to get up earlier to make sure that they were finished packing, ate breakfast, made lunch and get in the van. Although I was skeptical about this plan at first, everyone showed up on time and showed true commitment to the cause which can be seen by their passion to leave the church as quickly as possible to finish their projects.

It was bittersweet for some of us. Although we finished our project of insulating the house, we wanted to do more for the house but we had to leave if we wanted to get back to Dickinson on time. For me, it was hard leaving the house the way it was because I wanted to finish the house so that the mother of the owner of the home could see it before she passed away. It was hard for me to say that I was done when in reality it was not going to be done until the homeowner is able to move in and live there.

Looking back on the trip, I'm glad that I made the decision to go to New Orleans. It was amazing just to experience a new culture while helping out in the rebuilding process. I realized that the trip influenced me to try and move to New Orleans in the near future or at least visit the area because of the amazing culture that I felt.

Nicki Redmond

Today was our last day in New Orleans, and we were able to finish insulating the entire house. I know that was the goal of Allison's group from the beginning and I'm so happy we were able to complete the job.

I had a lot of moments today when I stopped and thought "I am really proud to be a part of this team". I expected to come to NOLA and learn about Katrina and the rebuilding efforts, but I honestly didn't expect to learn from the students as much as I have. It is so impressive to me that so many students chose to spend their spring break helping strangers. I didn't grow up doing service and it's not something that really crossed my mind until Dickinson. Seeing students choose to spend their one free week helping someone else is really inspiring.

I am also really proud of the students for waking up early to finish the houses today. It is obvious that everyone is really tired and worn out, but they were eager to wake up early if it meant getting more work done.

At one point today I found Kate in the back of the house, insulating a room all by herself. And Evan spent the week by himself insulating the attic. So much of my experience with Team Xtreme has been about working with the team. It was really touching to see Kate and Evan sacrifice that part of the trip – the ability to talk and laugh and dance while working – because the attic needs to be insulated or that dark room in the corner has to be finished.

I really look forward to sharing my experience with my colleagues and telling them about the students on the trip and how much I have learned from them in the short time we were together. It's a great reminder of why we come to work each day!

Evan Dubchansky

Although we all knew it was our final work day, we began the day with pride. We had been working hard all week and we were eager to accomplish our goals. Having worked on insulation all week, we began work and decided we wanted to finish all of it today. I spent most of Wednesday and Thursday working on two specific bedrooms and the attic and was sad to leave them unfinished at the end of yesterday. I started the morning by finishing the attic, an area that challenges me physically and mentally as I closed the family's items into the attic and boxed myself out by filling in the walls with insulation! I finished the attic and filled in the final two ceiling panels with insulation and moved on to help Colleen and Luigi, the infamous insulation team. We cut out and hung the final pieces of insulation and I could see the happiness on their faces as they put in the final staples. We took a moment to admire our accomplishment, but we were pressured by time and had to begin cleaning up. I knew another group would be coming, but I wanted the houses to look as cared for as possible so the next volunteers would have a good first impression of the home. Leaving our project wasn't easy, but we made great progress and I am confident future groups will continue our work. I would love to go back to the house in a few years and see the home and the rest of the street. But I can't help it but to think of the time that has passed thus far. But if each of us shares our stories and experiences, we can do our part to spread awareness of the situation and struggles in the gulf coast. As sad as I am for the trip to come to a close, I am so excited to get to continue being with the group. On my past service trips, I made great friends, but I haven't seen them since. I can't wait for weekly lunches, saying hi when we cross paths and knowing that I have become close with 28 amazing Dickinson students and admins.

I LOVE YOU all and just because the trip is ending, don't mean anything we shared has to disappear.

Melissa Keebler

This has been an overwhelming and exhausting week both physically and mentally. Our team hung dry wall and installed insulation at our worksite, and we discovered that there is a reason why people are hired solely to hand drywall- because it's really hard! Beyond the obvious physical demands of the work, our team really struggled with the ongoing setbacks of doing things incorrectly and having to do it over again! While that was frustrating on its own, I think what really got to all of us that we wanted to get as much done as possible while we were there. We finally hit our rhythm yesterday and really got quite a bit accomplished. Ken the project manager for Epworth stopped by to check on our progress and told us more about our home owner and the neighborhood. Wearing all of this really got us going to have an incredibly productive afternoon and to come back strong this morning.

I know we were all sad to have to leave today. Everyone really felt a connection with this city and the people who call it home, and I know we all really felt that we were making a significant contribution to rebuild, but I know we all wanted more time to do more. I was so impressed with my team and the entire group- everyone was so positive and completely focused on the task at hand. I feel truly privileged to have had this opportunity to share this experience with this group of amazing students (and administrators!) and really hope i am able to do this again!

Shanice Grant

OMG OMG OMG, can you believe that it is my eighteenth birthday and I am spending it in New Orleans helping to make dreams come true and hope to others. It is a bittersweet day for me as it is our last day of work and then we begin the drive back to school. The memories I made this week I will hold onto forever. The joy and laughter that we have experienced as a group has been a wonderful life changing thing. I have listened to many stories this past week, seen sights that have brought smiles to my face. After completing our first house (though not to the extent) I still felt a sense of pride and accomplishment that now our homeowner was able to move into her home. We have accomplished a great deal this week and learned many invaluable lessons. The bonds that we formed as a group was a great thing to not only witness but to be a part of. I am sad to leave, but I cannot wait to get back to school to spread the word to all that I know and now I wait with bated breath until the next time I am able to come back and continue this work.

Saturday, March 19th

Martin Navarrete

After being in New Orleans for a few days I learned so much from the community as well as from myself. The energy from the city and the people are so vivid and alive it is hard to bare notice to the tragedies that have even occurred. I think from meeting the house owner and her brother I got a sense of how they perceived their city. They explained how besides all the alcohol the city was focused on how family oriented and close the community was. It was

believable and honest because through all the struggles this family had stuck together to rebuilding this home that holds this house owner and her daughter in the second part of the house. I came to really understand it because I am the same way with my family. My family through thick and thin has been through the parents and whatever the task/obstacle we have stuck together. It's something I hold very valuable in my personal life because I know I am not alone and have a support I can rely on. I see it with these homeowners and community where through small actions of mowing each other's lawn they help one another. This bond of family extends to people they may not know but knowing that they are in the area and that their action would be appreciated makes it all worthwhile. It is amazing to see how a city is so united because it makes New Orleans unique.

Drew Robinson

Something I have learned over my college career is that true understanding can come through lived experience. Today has cemented that lesson in my mind with our tour of New Orleans and in particular the areas which were devastated by hurricane Katrina. While images and words can attempt to describe the scene, only actually being in that place and time can truly point the picture of a distinct culture and community. I am sure over the next week this lesson will reveal itself in new different ways as we embark on our mission to serve the New Orleans community by helping rebuild damaged homes.

Today during our large group reflection a common theme was the frustration over government inefficiency of solving the many problems presented in the city. Ultimately what it boils down to is the current state of the city and particularly its education system, simply is not good enough. As a nation we need to hold ourselves to a higher standard-the wealthiest nation in the world should not have desolated communities such as the ones we saw today. While perhaps this is a bit idealistic, I am hopeful that we as a generation, and as engaged Dickinsonians, can work to improve these communities by attacking flawed, corrupt systems of oppression and implementing innovative and comprehensive policies to create lasting change. This is a broad idea in theory however, as it is abundantly clear that these problems are complex beyond our comprehension. I found myself dumbfounded today to see homes completely refurbished that would fit well into any normal neighborhood, surrounded by abandoned homes, clearly destroyed by the storm.

While we all will learn a lot during our time here, I believe it is important to recognize that our understanding of the problems facing New Orleans and the effects of Hurricane Katrina will always be limited. We can hear survivor's stories see the destruction and experience the culture, but we will never be able to fully comprehend what this city and these people have gone through. It is with this approach of humility that I hope to attempt to grasp the infinitely complex problems presented, all the while doing my best to lend a helping hand. This week we will be making a small contribution to rebuilding New Orleans by repairing homes. However, I believe the lessons we all learn and the experiences we all have this week will lead to a changed mindset, forever reminding us of the desperate need for compassion and understanding in this world.

Jamie Bugel

We started our long trip back to Carlisle on Friday and the temperature has already dropped and the time zone has changed but I still feel like we left Louisiana just an hour before. Now that I have gotten to know everyone on the trip the car ride is more of a time to talk with everyone even more and it's great. While everyone is sleeping in ridiculously uncomfortable positions in the car though I feel like I can finally start to reflect on everything that happened over the past week. It is hard to take in and process everything that happens to you at a certain time so now I just enjoy looking out at the road and thinking about what I learned.

First, I realized that I definitely want to go back. Unfortunately, a week is just not long enough to get to know an area. Even though it was sometimes annoying having to drive the 40 minutes or so to our worksite everyday, I really enjoyed looking out the window and seeing, even if it was just for a moment, some of the neighborhoods and other areas that I didn't have the time to personally visit. I don't think I fell in love with the city quite as quickly as others on the trip but that's really a good thing. My family moved 5 times from the time I began kindergarten and graduated high school and one of the most important things that I learned was that the places I miss the most or had the biggest impact on me were those that I didn't immediately take a huge liking to. Regarding cities, I know that you need to live there at least for a year to discover all those the great things about it that are not in the touristy section or not publicized and off the radar. It is hard to discover these places when just visiting. I also took it as a great sign that I had already begun to find hidden treasures in New Orleans with a quick walk around the neighborhood we were working in. However, you also discover more things that you don't like about a place when you live there for example, the area we were working in did not really have a grocery store and you pretty much needed a car to get anywhere. I know that this is like most neighborhoods in America but sometimes when you first experience a place it is easy for the good things to out weight the bad. Unfortunately, I feel like this is how the city of New Orleans is handling their problems. The first day we visited and saw all of the beautiful architecture and bustling streets of the French Quarter and I absolutely loved it. The church we went to was also amazing and the people there were even better. Then we took the flood tour. These neighborhoods are what New Orleans and the surrounding region is mostly made up of. It is so easy to publicize the busy city center and forget the places that house the cities inhabitants, the places where the people who make the city what it is live. This happens all over the place, but seeing New Orleans with fresh eyes (I had never been there before) I felt as if I could take everything in without being extremely biased and I realized as we were leaving just how much work needed to be done. The manual labor and rebuilding will happen eventually, it may take longer than it should (in many cases it already has) but the way the city works in particular the education system may never change. I don't have all the facts but I viewed the city in a downward cycle, the fact that there are no jobs to attract the well educated and it is already hard to find a way to give citizens a good education just keeps breeding a culture where people are either trapped or feel they must escape and never look back.

Second, I realized how much I learned in one week. I got to learn new construction techniques and I have never done anything like that where I could come back to the same project day after day. I learned a lot about the people that live in New Orleans, and the people that come from

other states just like us to help out. Most importantly though I learned about other people from Dickinson. It is extremely hard to find connections with people as quickly as I did on this service trip. It's not the proximity of everyone (after going on training trips with a sports team where we spent just as much time together we do get closer but by the end everyone really needs a break from each other and after the trip everyone's preconceived notions of teammates can still get in the way of making connections) but the combination of everyone's openness and commitment to what you are in New Orleans for. The common goal everyone has is magic in terms of getting to know others and I am so lucky to have experienced it first-hand.

Jeanne Muller

Last night we slept in a hotel in Chattanooga. Aline and I watched coverage of the ongoing disaster in Japan while we were getting ready for bed. She was telling me about how the Chernobyl disaster is still hurting people in Europe and Russia today. Why does it take tragedies like this to make us stop and think about whether we're making the best choices? I hope that we don't forget the disaster in New Orleans as easily as that. Sometimes I'm afraid we already have, but then I think about all the volunteers that are still going to the city to lend a hand, and I'm hopeful.

We left the hotel early this morning to start out on the final stretch back to Dickinson. It feels good to be on the road, between endpoints. I find myself gazing out the window at the endless ribbon of fields along the highway. Every now and then I'll see a few horses, or a herd of cows. (There were some long-horned cows in one plot. And I saw a group of maybe fifty cows all facing the same direction! What curious creatures our bovine friends are.) But what I like most about being on the road is that I can think about things. When the car is quiet and people are sleeping, the drone of the cars on the highway and the constant scenery give me time to reflect on where we've been and where we're going.

I think about how much I want to go back to New Orleans one day, if only to visit. I don't think of myself as one who gets easily attached and I am surprised at how much I miss the place.

I think about how much I don't want to go back to Carlisle and start school again. I know that exams and papers are going to suck me in as soon as that horrible Sunday sunshine lights up my room.

I think about what's going to happen to our group once we get back. We'll probably all go back to our regular routines, for the most part. We might see each other from time to time in the HUB or the Quarry, and there'll be that look or nod of acknowledgement that says, "Hey, we shared something, and I love you for that." (Or in David's case it will be a Kid Cudi-esque "I'M GETTIN' MINEEE" with the thumbs and all.) We might have reunions to keep some connection. But for the most part we'll go back to what we had. And I think that's okay. You know why? Because even if it was just this week, and even if it doesn't last beyond this week, I know that I won't forget it and it'll always be there in my head, where I can tap into it whenever I want. (This is coming from an extremely forgetful individual.) I'll be able to think about all the hard work we did, all the great food we ate, all the jokes we made, and all the weird and wonderful, beautiful people I spent time with.

And, of course, I'll be able to think about that time when Kevin surprise trust-falled Mira.

I love you all, and am so glad to have been a part of this trip (thanks again Nate). Stay cool and keep caring.

We are in West Virginia now. It's been a long drive back up and very bitter sweet. Probably much more bitter than sweet. This week has been amazing for one; I never thought I would enjoy doing construction as much as I did. I loved putting up dry wall and the satisfaction that by the end of the week our house was finally starting to look like a house. Ken was able to give us the back story for our home owner. She's been living in Oklahoma since the storm, and wasn't sure she wanted to come back. She has insurance money but couldn't afford the labor, which is how she found Epworth. The area we're working in was hit almost as bad as the 9th ward; they had 15-20 feet of water, the area didn't really have levees protecting it. Our house was flooded almost to the top of the roof. Ken knows because he couldn't find a waterline. The water only sat for a couple days instead of weeks like New Orleans.

Liz Stuhr

Leaving the house Friday was really hard. There was so much left to do in the house, and it made me much more upset than I was anticipating.

The group has been an incredible support. Everyone cares so much about the work we were doing and I know all of us share mixed feelings about our departure.

I'll use this space to say how much I have enjoyed all of your company this week, to thank Mira for all her work behind the scenes, and I look forward to continuing to see you all around campus and getting to know you all better! ☺

NOLA' 11 <3

Jessie Shaffner

The past couples days have been really touching since I am so sick. It's been hard to keep a positive attitude while I feel like I'm dying, but reflecting on the week it was worth it to go to NO. Were about an hour from Dickinson and its sad to think it's coming to a close. I just hope that I can stay in touch with all the wonderful people I've meet this week. The group has been so supportive and nice to one another. I really loved getting to know all of you!

Mira Hewlett

This week has flown by. It is hard to imagine that only a week ago we were leaving Dickinson about to start the long journey down to New Orleans. 18 hours drive time seems to take forever. But now we are on the way home after a wonderful week.

As I start to look back and reflect on all that happened, I see two main themes emerge. First is community. While all service teams get along, this team seems to have really cliqued in unique ways. I have seen people jump from friend group to friend group just to talk to new people; I have seen people step up and willing to help anyone on the team, it doesn't have to be those they know best; and I have seen others sit for hours hanging out and playing a random assortment of games. We have articulated it many times, but there are so many ways that Dickinson divides people into groups based on housing, interest, major, or lots of artificial groupings. However this team has come from areas all over campus and all over the nation (and world with Aline) and it has worked. The community has been strengthened as we sweated together on worksites, cooked in a kitchen not built to make meals for 30, and lived together for a week in Slidell. I hope this microscopic experience is something we can each take back to Dickinson and see that it's okay to make new friends outside our circles and the benefits of knowing people in other "groups."

Second, the theme of service above self really rose from all participants this week. While we have all said it's about service to others, going on a service trip sometimes is more about the experience we want to have or the cool new place to visit as opposed to the opportunity to sit beside and work beside those in need. But this trip I noticed again and again that it was about serving others before ourselves. Serving others was drywalling and redrywalling and recutting until that one piece FINALLY went up on the ceiling. Serving others was about putting the finishing touches on a home that would soon be occupied and making the sink plumbing work, no matter what it took. Serving others was insulating entire houses under hot masks for hours on end because that was needed to take one step forward for this family. Serving others was cooking meals and cleaning pots with burnt rice, several nights in a row. Serving others was about waking up really early to make the commute to the city to have a few extra hours to give each of our houses. Serving others was allowing your seatmate you fall asleep on the ride home and stretch out a bit, even if that meant being cramped for a while yourself.

Thank you for making this a memorable trip and for your energy and passion to build community and serve others. It is inspiring to know that Dickinson is comprised of individuals ready to work together to make a difference and share hope with a community far far away.

Nathan Toews

The trip went so well. It was incredible. The reflections were awesome and I was so impressed with everyone. It'll never cease to amaze me how well people bond on service trips. This was my third time down to NOLA, but it never gets old. My team's worksite, later shared worksite with the team Extreme was HUGE, but we managed to accomplish so much. I've never liked

having to walk away from a site with so much work left to do, but I still felt a great sense of accomplishment. I'm pretty sure all the insulation was finished, which is awesome. I can't wait for another opportunity to return again. Kendra's idea for the bag of notes was a huge hit. I felt a little guilty not writing as many as other people, but I'm positive there were plenty of notes written for everybody. I want to thank everyone for the kind words left for me. I still think my highlight of the trip (there were tons) is receiving a videotext of Kevin trust-falling Mira and her stepping out of the way. HILARIOUS. Trust is a dangerous thing. I feel privileged to have shared this trip with so many great people and look forward to hanging out and seeing everyone around campus. Be prepared for trust falls. LOVE ME...!!!