

# Readers Respond

In the Winter 2007 edition of *Claims Education Magazine*, we featured an article on International Insurance Institute's partnership with charities helping to rebuild New Orleans (see *New Orleans Rebuilding – Still a Long Way to Go*, pg. 11). Now, we are happy to report that readers have responded with donations of cash and assistance to the specific charities we highlighted.

Most notably, readers of *Claims Education Magazine* donated specially to the Dragon Café. The tremendous expense of clean-up and home rebuilding has left many families with little or no money for even basic necessities, such as food and clothing.

Funds donated to the Dragon Café go directly to purchase food, prepared and served by St. Martin's Episcopal Church members. The daily labor is still 100 percent on a volunteer basis.

While the early days of the program received large donations of food, those donations have largely dried up and food must now be purchased. Funds donated directly from *CEM* readers have helped this program continue without interruption.

Assistance has been coming in from all parts of the country. Notably, members of a Senior Youth Group (10 adults and 27 youths) of North Parish Unitarian Universalist Church of North Andover, Massachusetts, came to New Orleans to help with Katrina and tornado clean-up. They participated at the Dragon Café, serving meals not only to volunteers who have come to New Orleans to help rebuild, but anyone in need of a meal.

They spent their school vacation in New Orleans, from Sunday, February 18 through Saturday, February 25 and volunteered through a program called The Hurricane Relief and Social Justice Project, headed by Reverend Marilee Baccich.

The youths each paid \$300 towards their expenses and raised additional money

to cover the cost of food, rental vehicles, airfare, and housing in New Orleans. Church members supported their efforts by attending the coffee houses they hosted and an evening at a local restaurant which donated 10 percent of revenue for one evening to their trip. Many donated money towards the trip and offered encouragement.

One day during their trip, Loretta Middleton, the group leader who headed up the trip to New Orleans, brought with her five eager young volunteers to help serve up the food purchased and prepared with funds donated to the Dragon Café.

This was an assignment that they really enjoyed and was a welcomed change from the heavy work of gutting houses and clearing yard debris which they were doing in the lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward on the previous days.

About their experience, Ms. Middleton said, "We had a very rewarding trip to New Orleans, and all of us would like to return to do more."

The youth members serving at the Dragon Café on that particular day were Leila Smith, Diana Stewart, Michael Parker, Olivia Cristaldi, and Lauren Hartel.

Leila Smith commented, "The New Orleans service trip was an amazing experience and a great success. I enjoyed helping out in the Dragon Cafe on the last night. It was interesting to see the different kinds of people and hear what they had to say, and nice to see how grateful they were."

Diana Stewart added, "The trip really affected me and I fell in love with New Orleans. I am actually really happy I chose to go to the soup kitchen. I was rather tired that day and almost didn't go. But seeing all the unusually bright, smiley faces of both the people serving the food and also the people receiving it, was really worth it. There were musicians, volunteers, and

backpackers mixed in with the normal crowd of people. It was cool to hear their enthusiasm about who we were and then have them tell a little of their story. Overall, the trip opened my eyes to a lot, and I hope to visit New Orleans again at some point this summer!"

Michael Parker told *Claims Education Magazine*, "It was an amazing experience going down there and seeing all the devastation. But working at the Dragon Cafe gave me a good feeling, knowing that there are some great organizations down there really helping out the people in need."

Lauren Hartel mentioned, "The hospitality down in New Orleans (especially the church) was overwhelming. And the catfish was the best dish I've ever eaten!!"

*Claims Education Magazine* would like to thank its readers and the member companies of International Insurance Institute for their donations and support.

If you would like to assist III in helping the people of New Orleans, make your check payable to St. Martin's Church and mail to III – St. Martin's Fund, 2112 Belle Chasse Hwy., #11-319, Gretna, LA 70056. Be sure to specify which program you wish to sponsor.

Youth members of the North Parish Unitarian Universalist Church of North Andover, Massachusetts serve up a welcome meal to volunteers who have come to New Orleans to help rebuild, as well as those still homeless from Hurricane Katrina. From left to right: Lauren Hartel; Olivia Cristaldi; Michael Parker; Diana Stewart, and Leila Smith.

