

Couple's drive to help others sets an example for giving back



COURTESY OF RICHARD MARTIN

Richard and Dona Martin of Barrington drove this RV to Biloxi, Miss., to help Hurricane Katrina relief efforts at Camp Biloxi.

BY CAROL L. MACCABE

Daily Herald Correspondent

Richard and Dona Martin of Barrington have a heart for volunteering and for encouraging others to volunteer, too.

The Martins own Curves franchises in Palatine, Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove and Vernon Hills where they set an example for the club's members with their own volunteer work.

"Curves, as a corporation, encourages us to be active in our communities, finding out ways to participate in the community and be responsible, active people," Dona said.

Volunteer of the week

"We participated in the Food for Friends — Palatine Food Pantry food drive this March," Richard said. "We donated 800 to 1,000 pounds of food. It's wonderful that we're member supported and company supported."

They joined in to support the Apple Tree Campaign. Each August, school supplies are collected and donated to both Palatine Township Elementary District 15 and Palatine-Schaumburg High School District 211. This year, more than 1,200 children received supplies ranging from pencils and notebooks to art supplies and backpacks.

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast Aug. 29, 2005, The Martins wanted to help.

Dona made blankets to send to Katrina survivors, their Curves members raised \$1,300 which

Curves International matched and they helped with making "care packages" to welcome back people displaced by the hurricanes.

"Lutheran Church Charities in Addison was putting packages together," Dona said. "This is how we became involved as a couple."

Lutheran Church Charities was founded in 1947 as a nonprofit ministry to help Christian human care ministries of the church. The organization connects needs with resources to help Christians make a difference in people's lives.

The group decided to donate a recreational vehicle, used as a search and rescue vehicle after Katrina hit, to help in continuing relief efforts.

"It had been driven back up here for repairs and now needed to get back south," Richard said.

According to the Lutheran Church Charities Web site, the RV would be used as a home/office for the Rev. Ralph Buchhorn, chaplain at Camp Biloxi in Biloxi, Miss. He'd worked on relief efforts for about a year before funds ran out.

"There is little or no housing for volunteers or people returning to their neighborhoods," Richard said. "Congregations in surrounding communities took up collections so he can live there another year."

The Martins talked about it, realized they had the time to drive the RV to Biloxi and figured it would be a great help.

In late September, they packed medical supplies, blankets and assorted household supplies in

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the RV and set off trip.

"It was like a MASH unit," Richard said of Biloxi. "Every spare inch of space was being used. Train boxcars dropped on the site had pre-fab restrooms and showers for the volunteers to use. Refrigerator cars stored food for the mess tent, where 300 are fed daily."

The area had been outfitted with hook-ups for campers. Eighty percent of the spaces were filled with volunteers who are assisting with cleanup and rebuilding.

"Biloxi was probably harder hit than New Orleans," Dona said. "Everything along the side of the main road, which was like our Lake Shore Drive, was gone. There was a sign for an Olive Garden, but no building. Only the wires remained above a strip mall. It's unbelievable."

Richard and Dona said many people are still not in their houses. There is a lack of qualified, skilled workers to help rebuild and insurance companies are still debating if the damage was wind or water-related.

"What struck us is that Katrina's aftermath is front-page news for **them** every day,

whether on the TV or in the newspapers," Dona said. "Here we're so far away, it gets out of our minds and we forget the need."

The Martins said their trip to Biloxi was memorable because they were able to volunteer, work together and know they'd made a difference.

Their next project? "Cooking For Katrina" is a cookbook of favorite recipes gathered from members of all four of the Martins' Curves locations. With a quick turnaround, the \$10 book should be available in early 2007. The proceeds will go through Lutheran Church Charities, with every dollar going to help Katrina survivors.

Married for 32 years, Richard and Dona have a daughter, Sofie, who's a sophomore at St. Viator High School in Arlington Heights. Sofie also volunteers with her youth group at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Palatine. In their free time, the Martins love opera, the Bears, their dogs and cat and traveling with friends and family.

For more information about the "Cooking For Katrina" cookbook, call (847) 202-9292. For more about Lutheran Church Charities, visit www.lutheranchurchcharities.org.