

Nonprofit Samaritan's Purse aims to get 1,000 families back home

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AUSTIN, Texas — When Ervin Lassiter's neighborhood was ravaged by a tornado in April 2011, members of the nonprofit Samaritan's Purse were among the first faces he saw.

"My home was hit on a Saturday evening. By first thing Sunday morning, Samaritan's Purse was there," the Colerain, North Carolina, resident said in July 2018. "They helped me recover my home ... and then they built nine homes in my area from the ground up.

"Once all that was finished, our community said, 'It's time for us to start giving back.'"

Lassiter deployed with Samaritan's Purse to Moore, Oklahoma, where he spent a week helping tornado survivors recover. He traveled to Oklahoma at his own expense to try to help other people, but he found that he was the one being uplifted.

"I've been hooked ever since," Lassiter said in Rockport, Texas, where he was helping rebuild a Hurricane Harvey survivor's home. "This is my 20th [deployment], and I love it. I think it's God's calling."



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Five Samaritan's Purse construction teams based in the Rockport area are working to repair or rebuild homes damaged by Harvey.

Since Hurricane Harvey, FEMA's voluntary agency liaisons have helped Texas communities manage more than 91,000 volunteers from organizations like Samaritan's Purse and track more than 3.4 million volunteer-hours.

Within three years after Harvey's destruction, Samaritan's Purse plans to have helped 250 families get back home in Aransas, Nueces, Refugio and San Patricio counties. When combined with Samaritan's Purse teams in the Houston area, the goal is to return 1,000 families home.

Each Samaritan's Purse construction team is managed by a full-time construction supervisor, but the workers are new each week.

"The volunteers, every week, we get a new group. And we have to instruct them, show them how to use tools, show them what we're doing," said Construction Supervisor Tim Cottrell. "And their heart, you can't beat the heart of a volunteer. There's no way about it — their enthusiasm."

Volunteers come from all over the country to work together and live together in housing provided by the First Baptist Church of Portland, Texas, which can support up to 30 volunteers.

So far, Samaritan's Purse has approved 12 new home construction projects and 26 repair jobs for their volunteers to complete in the Rockport area. The nonprofit also will provide building materials to eight families and manufactured homes to



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Samaritan's Purse volunteers wear recognizable bright orange t-shirts when they work on homes, which remind passersby that people from other states still care about Harvey survivors and want to pitch in to help.

"There's not a day that passes that somebody — a local person, a resident or somebody just passing by — doesn't stop and say to our volunteers, 'Thank you for being here in our community,'" said Karen Hayes, office manager for Samaritan's Purse's Rockport-area operation. "Everybody has had just a true spirit of thankfulness and gratefulness."

Lassiter said he is just as grateful for the opportunity to serve as the community is to receive him.

"I always thank the homeowners for allowing us to come. ... I say, 'If you didn't allow them to come, the people that come from all over the country would not get their blessing,'" he said. "When I tell [homeowners that volunteers] come on their own time, their own expenses ... to work on their home, most of the time it blows their mind."

For additional information on Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the Hurricane Harvey disaster web page at www.fema.gov/disaster/4332, Facebook at www.facebook.com/FEMAHarvey, the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at www.twitter.com/FEMARegion6 or the Texas Division of Emergency Management website at <https://www.dps.texas.gov/dem/>.

