

# AmeriCorps' Heavy Lifting Makes Florence Survivors' Lives Brighter

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**COLUMBIA, S.C.** – On Oct. 23, crews of AmeriCorps members and volunteers from the community, Lowes, the United Way and even pro football player Julius Peppers, tight end for the Carolina Panthers, dropped by to help “muck and gut” homes in Bennettsville that were damaged by Hurricane Florence.

Muck and gut work includes moving damaged and mold-ridden furnishings out to the curb to be loaded in trucks and hauled away. The crews then scrape out the mud and dirt, strip the layers of flooring and cut and remove moldy sheetrock and insulation.

*Survivors with flood damage from Hurricane Florence, who need free help with debris cleanup and removal in South Carolina, should call the Crisis Cleanup Hotline at **843-212-0552** or visit <https://www.crisiscleanup.org/> by Nov. 2.*

The volunteers worked on several homes owned by the Douglas family. The family moved from the country to a mid-century bungalow in 1955. Eighty-year-old Robert Douglas Jr., the current family patriarch, still lives there. His sister, Helen Douglas Hayes, has a trailer on the property. The family compound also includes three other homes. Douglas reminisced about the family home explaining his was the first house on the street. “There wasn’t anything here when we moved in.”

“We had a lot of water here. Hurricane Matthew in 2016 started it and Florence finished it,” Douglas said. Both he and his sister lost everything this time.

“This is amazing man; this is like Hollywood,” Robert said when he saw the volunteers.

But when the teams moved to clear out Helen’s house, she was inconsolable as furniture and other treasures were brought to the curb. The next day she was calmer. “I hated to lose them,” the retired school secretary said. “But with the help of the Lord, I’ll get more.”



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The state identified Dillon, Marlboro, Marion and Chesterfield counties for Crisis Cleanup efforts using AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps members, aged 18-24, work in communities across the U.S. and in return receive a modest living allowance, room and board, and an education award that can be used for college funding.

AmeriCorps' goal is to muck and gut two homes per day before their mission's Nov. 26 end date. They have 99 members in the state and are expecting more to come. Of that number, 79 members are staying at a base camp near Bennettsville. These teams come from all over the country: Washington, Montana, New Mexico, Tennessee, Minnesota and Iowa.

Joseph Sanchez, 22, is working his first deployment. He is attached to the New Mexico Conservation Corps, a branch of AmeriCorps. He graduated from high school in 2014 and wanted to do conservation work. He said he joined the corps and learned stone masonry, carpentry and arboriculture, working outside in national and state parks.

"I've been mucking and gutting and clearing out carpeting," he said of his work so far. "The owners are so grateful, but there is so much to do."

Luke Wigle is the incident commander in charge of the operations in South Carolina. Originally from Minneapolis, he lives in Washington State and is a full-timer with the Washington Conservation Corps. When he finished college, he knew he wanted to work in natural resources.

"So, I moved out West looking for work," he said. "Within two weeks I was offered a job in Seattle." He has worked with the corps for 10 years, becoming full time two years ago. He said one of the goals of AmeriCorps is developing leaders.

"This is my career, I love it and am passionate about what we do."

Residents who've suffered damage as result of Hurricane Florence should avail themselves of all types of assistance currently available. *Crisis Cleanup* is a free service currently being offered in the Pee Dee Region that connects survivors with volunteers who are skilled in cleaning up storm damage. Additionally, anyone with unmet needs as a result of storms and flooding should call 2-1-1 to inquire about



what local aid might be available.

For more information on Hurricane Florence and South Carolina recovery, visit the S.C. Emergency Management Division website at [scemd.org](http://scemd.org), on social media ([@SCEMD](https://twitter.com/SCEMD) on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram), or FEMA's Hurricane Florence disaster webpage at [www.fema.gov/disaster/4394](http://www.fema.gov/disaster/4394), or Facebook at [www.facebook.com/FEMA](https://www.facebook.com/FEMA), and the FEMA Region 4 Twitter account at [twitter.com/FEMARegion4](https://twitter.com/FEMARegion4).



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