

Military spouse-volunteers join the Hurricane Sandy recovery effort

Military Family Month: Military spouse-volunteers join the Hurricane Sandy recovery effort



If you've got a job to do, ask a busy person or -- better yet -- a busy military spouse. How apt that Army War College student spouses would carve time out of the Month of the Military Family to contribute volunteer work to Hurricane Sandy victims in Far Rockaway, Queens.

Several dozen student spouses invested a day of dirty, difficult work on behalf of the easternmost residents of the Rockaway Peninsula in the New York borough. They left behind a host of inviting activities in Manhattan to donate hundreds of pounds of donated food, shovel sand, clear debris, scrub surfaces, and add their disaster-aid efforts to those of Team Rubicon.

The military veterans group that has been made famous by its disaster assistance efforts incorporated The War College volunteers into the big effort, armed them with Home Depot-donated gloves and respirators, and delegated them to move wheelbarrows full of tools to their assignments.

In two groups over many hours, the volunteers shoveled out a house that had been literally buried in sand while another group tackled a house for which the basement had been completely filled with surge waters.

“I’ve never seen a war but this was a mess,” said volunteer Erika Snyder. “They shoveled sand off the porch because they couldn’t even open doors into the homes. They were finding the owner’s belongings in the sand.”

The homeowner’s arrival created an emotional moment, said Snyder.

“These women were on their hands and knees. The more crowbars and hammers, the more they got into it – ripping, using anything available, even a snowscraper, to take the muck from a window. She couldn’t thank us enough,” said Snyder.” Almost three weeks after the storm, and here she is with everything she owned dumped in the street.”

It takes a volunteer to appreciate others’ volunteer efforts.

Team Rubicon was great, coordinating groups from Lawrence, Kansas, and Houston, and across the United States, said Snyder. “They’ve so young! They’re wonderful people and they’ve been doing this all along, living in an unheated warehouse with two or three food wagons.”

Taking part in the academic field trip to New York City, the spouses intended to learn alongside the colonels and lieutenant colonels of the class in small group visits to international missions to the United Nations, among others. When some NYC organizations curtailed visits, these spouses elected to leverage their volunteer spirit for Sandy victims. Yet another spouse-volunteer group sorted and distributed materials at the Goodwill in Queens.