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## Louisiana Flood

“Massive flooding in Louisiana in mid-August hit areas that were already underwater in March. Unbelievably, August’s storms were even worse than the already historic flooding in the spring,” said Len and Carrie Blauwkamp, regional managers for World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS).

“The landscape in Denham Springs in September was overwhelming. The debris in front of people’s homes — appliances, furniture, drywall, insulation — was everywhere. Then we’d see something that reminded us how personal the losses were — a child’s bed, a crib, or a grandfather clock.”

The Blauwkamps are working with communities in Louisiana, including some that World Renew DRS has worked with in the past, to let them know about the



services DRS can offer in long-term recovery. From there, we anticipate requests for unmet needs assessments and opportunities to send group mission trips. As the recovery progresses, there may be more opportunities to set up a DRS reconstruction site.

Thank you to everyone who has donated financially and continues to give to support the survivors of disasters like the Louisiana floods.



**World Renew is pleased to announce the appointment of Robert Laarman as Director of Disaster Response Services. Bob officially began his role as director on October 3, 2016.**

### **World Renew Disaster Response Services' Mission is:**

To show God's love and bring hope to disaster-impacted communities in North America by restoring the homes and lives of those who are most vulnerable,

To help communities build their capacity to prepare for and recover from disasters, and,

To provide opportunities for Christians to honor the Lord by using their time, talents, and financial resources in service to others.

## Letter from Your New DRS Director

### **Dear Friends:**

World Renew DRS directors — Neil Molenaar, Michael Bruinooge, Bev Abma, Bill Adams, Ron Willett, and Andrew Ryskamp as interim director — have all made unique contributions while leading DRS over the 40-plus years of this ministry's history. I am honored to continue in this line of service to DRS and to survivors in communities affected by disaster.

I participated in a recent gathering where most of the former DRS directors were present. They all talked about the key role that volunteers play in the success of each level of the organization. Their appreciation for and pride in what has been accomplished over the years while working with so many capable volunteers was very evident.

I have met some of you already, and I'm looking forward to meeting each volunteer. You are an important and dependable part of building a strong disaster response organization in DRS. Early indications are that you are a fun group as well — that is a good combination for working together and staying energetic.

As we strive together to keep DRS vigorous, I want to hear your ideas about what changes may be needed for this vibrant ministry in the future. How can we build on the historical strengths of DRS to shape what we need to serve people well for years to come?

Pray with me, as you have been. Let's eagerly look forward to what part we will play in the ministry God has planned for us.

Serving Christ with You,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Laarman". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Bob Laarman, Director  
Disaster Response Services

*To find out more, visit [worldrenew.net](http://worldrenew.net) and search "Laarman DRS Director."*  
*Feel free to send a welcome note to Bob! You can email him at [blaarman@worldrenew.net](mailto:blaarman@worldrenew.net) or call 800-848-5818.*



### **Sea to Sea 2017**

Do you love cycling? Do you want to help end poverty? Visit [seatosea.org](http://seatosea.org) to find out about next year's ride or call 800-552-7972 for more information.

## Thank God Someone Cares



In September, members of the first DRS volunteer leaders, a.k.a. the DRS Pioneer Leadership Team, joined with several former DRS directors (Neil, Mike, Bev, Bill, Andy), new DRS Director Bob Laarman, and World Renew Director Carol Bremer-Bennett, and other DRS staff to celebrate and reflect on their experiences as Green Shirts.

In September, the group joined for prayer, sharing, fellowship, and thanking God for His blessings on the ministry. Erve and Barb Mosher, two of the early DRS volunteers, attended the event.

“The second time my wife Barb and I went out with DRS was in 1989 in Saint Charles, Missouri, after the Mississippi River flooded and washed out a lot of homes,” said Erve Mosher. “We were doing a needs assessment and as we drove along the side of a hill, we looked down into the valley and saw one lone house. We wondered if we should go down there, and of

**Front row (l-r):** Bev Abma, Carol Bremer-Bennett, Ann Rotman, Neil Molenaar, Bill Adams, Sue Grassmid, Barb Mosher.

**Back row (l-r):** Gary De Haan, Connie De Haan, Andrew Ryskamp, Pauline Mitchell, Shelia Pasma, Marcia Van Popering, Michael Bruinooge, Joyce Boerman, Art Opperwall, Tony Bouman, Becky Purdom, Erve Mosher, Bob Laarman.

course we did — because that was why we were there.

“As we got out of the car, the homeowner walked up and asked what we were doing. We told him that we were from a recovery group formed by some of the churches in the community and gathering information about the needs people had after the flood.

“He invited us inside to see the work that he, his father, and his son were doing on the house. About all that was left were the exterior walls. ‘This is all we have,’ he said. He told us they had insurance but felt that they could rebuild on their own and would not need outside help.

“We spent about 20 minutes talking with him. As we said goodbye and

got into the car, he turned to us and said, ‘Thank God someone cares.’ That really hit us. We didn’t think we had done anything! We just showed up and took time to visit with him. We’ve carried that memory through our 17 years of disaster response work. It is a reminder that when we show up in people’s lives, God uses us in His own unique way. DRS volunteers truly are His hands and feet. To God be the glory!

“We are truly thankful that the Christian Reformed denomination has in World Renew a ministry that provides volunteers in disasters. God uses them where He sees fit to support those in need of long-term disaster recovery.”

### Becky Purdom Hangs Up her Green Shirt

After 13 years of joyful and dedicated work, Becky Purdom will retire from World Renew DRS on December 31, 2016. We are so thankful for the gifts Becky brought to the DRS program: her willingness to offer to help, her dedication to prayer, and her exceptional relationship skills.

“It has been a truly humbling experience working with everyone,” Becky said. “But now I get to retire like so many of you! Never have I met people who are as selfless as our DRS volunteers. It has been an honor and a pleasure to get to know you and work with you. I will truly miss talking with everyone. Love to each of you.”

## Across North America, DRS Volunteers Respond

Storms, floods, fires, and other disasters are going on throughout the U.S. and Canada right now. DRS staff knew that fall 2016 would be busy, but we didn't realize how much work there would be!

### Reconstruction

After Typhoon Soudelor hit the U.S. Commonwealth of **Saipan** in November 2015, the island's recovery group invited DRS to partner with them in rebuilding. Over the summer, DRS sent a scouting team and building estimators to find out how we could serve the community. The recovery group then asked DRS and Mennonite Disaster Services to help with home repair. When FEMA provided invitational travel reimbursements to skilled carpenters, DRS agreed to provide six months of reconstruction services. Project Managers Don and Gert Vos are supporting the efforts, and Harv and Verla Klaver are the site leaders for the first nine weeks. The first reconstruction team arrived on September 3, 2016.

Early this summer, Managers Doug and Mary Van Der Meulen were surprised to learn that our lodging arrangements in **San Marcos, Texas**, had fallen through. Doug and Mary made calls and visits until a church in Martindale, Texas, agreed to host our volunteers. The first work team started on September 17, 2016. Thank you, Doug and Mary, for a job well done! Thanks to the prep team and to the first On-Site Managers Laurie and Lola McGladdery for setting up our new housing.

We are excited to open a new site in **Rio Grande Valley, Texas**, with



**Volunteers worship at Ocean Community Church in New Jersey.**



**Volunteers from Willow Grove Korean Reformed Church.**



**DRS volunteers clean up a house in West Virginia.**

housing in Weslaco. This site started on September 17, 2016, with work in Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy counties. The area has flooded many times over the years — twice in 2015. Project Managers Joel and Angie Ploegstra have spent many hours preparing this site. Thank you, Joel and Angie, for all of your hard work. Thank you to the prep team and to On-Site Managers Ben and Marijane Huizinga!

In August, the path was cleared to open a site in **Calaveras County, California**, after fires occurred there in September 2015. An unmet needs assessment team

completed their work last spring, and Regional Managers Don and Gert Vos have been working closely with the local recovery group to set up all new builds. They also found housing at the Frogtown Fair Grounds in Angels Camp, California. The facility has an indoor kitchen and eating area. Volunteers will be housed in RVs, whether they bring their own or use those provided by DRS. Work began on October 8. Thank you to Don and Gert and the prep team for getting this site ready.

While closing up our site in Pensacola this spring, we wondered if we might return in the fall. Tornadoes went through **Century, Florida**, soon after and damaged more homes. After Regional Managers Eric and Nancy Johnson found housing, DRS agreed to return to the area. We want to thank Habitat for Humanity for again providing rent-free housing for us in northern Pensacola, about 35 miles from Century. DRS will work with Habitat on new builds and reconstruction. Doug and Pat Guikema are the project managers and opened the site on October 15, 2016.

After three years of hard work, we closed the doors to our reconstruction site in **Ocean County, New Jersey** on September 1, 2016. Many friendships were made, and many people returned to their homes. DRS was truly blessed by our hosts, especially Ocean Community Church, who welcomed us and allowed us to take over their space. We want to thank all of the volunteers who worked in Ocean County, some more than once. Thank you to Project Managers Rich and Phyl

### DRS group volunteers at Community Church of Keyport, New Jersey.

Grevnstuk for organizing, setting up work, and attending meetings and conferences. THANK YOU, Rich and Phyl! We also want to thank the last team and On-Site Managers Sid and Carol Postema for an excellent job closing up.

### Needs Assessments

In June, Rich and Pat Grasman led a team who went door-to-door and staffed walk-in centers to find those who experienced flooding last spring in counties near St. Louis, **Missouri**. In July, Bruce and Christine de Boer led a team to Greenville, **Mississippi**, in response to spring flooding there. The team braved the hot weather and a great job. Denny and Judy Stoel led a team in Greenbrier and surrounding counties in **West Virginia** in September in response to the severe flooding in June. Flooding also hit the south this summer, and Garry and Lynne Den Besten led a team to Orange and nearby counties in southeast **Texas**. The weather was very warm, but our volunteers persevered.

### Building Estimating

In mid-June, Lee and Sue Mys went to Florence County, **South Carolina**, to conduct building estimates after flooding in October 2015. Lee and Sue completed estimates that kept the recovery group working for several months.

### Regional Project Managers

**United States:** Carrie and Len Blauwkamp are working with recovery groups in Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Eric and Nancy Johnson are working with



communities in South Carolina. Don and Gert Vos are monitoring fires in California and acting project managers in California and Saipan. Rich and Pat Grasman are checking on recent flooding in the Midwest and participating in meetings and conference calls. Rick and Bonnie Wiersma are in touch with communities in West Virginia, making visits, attending meetings and participating in conference calls about recent floods there. Doug and Pat Guikema are keeping an eye on their region while acting as project managers in Century, Florida. Jay DeBoer and the Den Bestens are in touch with communities, recovery groups, and emergency managers in their areas. Many have been on conference calls, corresponded by emails, and attended meetings.

**Canada:** Henry and Linda Visscher are working with communities in Alberta after wildfires swept through Fort McMurray last spring. The Wood Buffalo Communities recovery group has requested intake and unmet needs assessment forms from several organizations including World Renew. The group is reviewing the forms to decide which to use in their response. DRS is not responding to any

disasters in eastern Canada at this time, but Bruce and Christine de Boer are strengthening relationships with partners there.

We want to thank our all of our regional project managers for their work in their regions.

### Rapid Response

A rapid response team from Michigan joined with a church group from New Jersey to serve families in Webster Springs, West Virginia, who experienced flooding in June. The area's mountain roads and washed-out bridges presented many challenges, but the community expressed deep appreciation for our help. DRS volunteers also spent several days in West Michigan removing downed trees and debris after a tornado in August.

### Group Mission Trips

DRS group volunteers are active year-round. From New Jersey to Washington and Michigan to Mississippi, group volunteers bring help and hope to disaster survivors. It is gratifying to hear from our partners about DRS's humble, helpful, hardworking volunteers — and to hear how our volunteers are changed by their experience.

## “Paul’s” Letter to DRS

Written by Mike Hoyer, while working as a DRS volunteer in New Jersey this year.

Dear friends:

I heard about your conversation at break time yesterday afternoon. I have wisdom to impart. He who has ears, let him hear.

Now about gifts, I want you to listen up. We all serve Christ but in different ways. Similarly, DRS is a unit made of many gifted people. Although there are many of you, you are one body, a.k.a. DRS. So it is with Christ. For we are all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Americans or Canadians, Wizard players or Wizard cheaters — and we are all given one Spirit to drink.

Now, DRS is not made up of one part but many, and they form one body. If Becky Purdom would say, “Because I am not a construction supervisor, I do not belong to DRS.” Or if your wonderful cook should say, “Because I am not an on-site manager, I do not belong to DRS,” she would not for that reason cease to be a part of DRS. If the whole DRS team were painters, where would the dry-walling end up? If the whole DRS team were chefs, where would the plastering and mudding be?

But no, God has arranged each part of your DRS team just as He wanted to be. So as it is, there are many volunteers, but one DRS team. The construction supervisor can’t say to the cook, “I don’t need you.” Nor can the construction volunteers say to the on-site manager, “We don’t need you.” But God has arranged all the parts of your team so that there would be no division among you. If one of you suffers, everyone suffers. If one of you is honored, every one of you should rejoice with him or her.

Now in my next letter, I will show you a more excellent way. I think you know what I mean. It’s about LOVE!

Sincerely, “Paul”



**Volunteers leave Byron Center, Michigan, for Rio Grande Valley, Texas, to set up housing.**



**Volunteers from Bethel CRC in Lansing, Illinois, work in Mississippi.**

### Plan A Gift

There are many ways you can impact lives when you support the ministry of World Renew DRS. One way is to bless others through World Renew DRS with a gift in your Will. Your legacy gift and other planned giving donations are a meaningful way to communicate what is important to you and to ensure that the ministries you value continue into the future.

For more information, visit [worldrenew.net/planagift](http://worldrenew.net/planagift), or call 800-552-7972 in the U.S. or 800-730-3490 in Canada.

## Cultural Awareness and Diversity



DRS connects with more community members in North America than any other World Renew program. Because of World Renew's focus on people who live in poverty and the connection between poverty and need after a disaster, DRS staff and volunteers often cross economic and racial lines in serving others. Historically, DRS volunteers come from the majority culture and a middle-class context.

For these reasons, World Renew has made a significant investment in addressing the cultural and racial assumptions that create barriers to ministering effectively with people in need.

### World Renew's Vision on Diversity

Honoring God, we reflect God's diverse body as an anti-racist, reconciling, transparent institution that is accountable to the communities it serves for how we live and work together.

### Mission

To establish the highest levels of trust possible at all levels of World Renew, including program implementation. Staff and volunteers are competent implementers of anti-racism initiatives and reconciliation programming.

Under this guiding vision, DRS recognizes the importance of establishing a long-term strategy to build cultural awareness and diversity among our staff and volunteers. A planning committee for cultural awareness and diversity has been established with the following objectives:

- to determine an appropriate training approach that achieves helpful cultural awareness
- to achieve an agreed-to level of ethnic diversity in our volunteer workforce
- to connect DRS appropriately to the anti-racism efforts of World Renew as an agency of the Christian Reformed Church in North America

### How Did the Green Shirts Begin?

"When DRS first started, we were trying to figure out what color shirt we should wear. I said that I like green because green means go! No other organization was wearing green shirts at that time, so we went with it. Then one day we were working in California years and years ago, and I heard someone ask, 'Where do we get help?' And the person answered by pointing and saying, 'You see those green shirts over there?' And that was it! The Green Shirts were born!"

—Neil Molenaar, founder World Renew DRS



DRS volunteers on a needs assessment after an earthquake in Fortuna, California, in 1992.



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## Does Your Church Know About World Renew DRS?

A new video from World Renew DRS is on its way to you this fall! This exciting, informative resource will help your church family learn

more about DRS and invite them to get involved. The video highlights the crucial, compassionate services that DRS volunteers offer survivors in the months and years after a disaster. Just because we are "Under Blue Skies" right now doesn't mean we are resting!

Stay tuned for the release of this upcoming video and ask your church deacons or missions committee to schedule a DRS Sunday sometime in 2017. Suggest that they show the new video, take an offering for DRS, and consider sharing volunteer opportunities with your congregation.



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