Harvey Relief Fund for students and employees reaches $100K

Donation will help cover tuition, textbooks, transportation, food, and other expenses

BAYTOWN, TX — Shortly after Hurricane Harvey battered Baytown and surrounding communities with heavy rains that produced catastrophic flooding, Lee College Pres. Dr. Dennis Brown and members of the president's cabinet decided to create a disaster relief fund to help students and employees recover from their losses and rebuild their homes and lives.

Now, just over a month after the storm first made landfall in Texas, the Lee College Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund has raised more than $100,000 and is still growing. The Lee College Foundation, Scholarship America, Santa Fe College in Florida, Inceptia, the Collette Foundation, ExxonMobil, and numerous individual donors have all made sizable contributions.

At the September meeting of the Lee College Board of Regents, Brown thanked donors for their generosity and praised staff for working so quickly to set up the fund and "get the money in the hands of those who are most in need" — including the hundreds of students and employees so far who have received help to cover the cost of textbooks, tuition, transportation, food, home repairs and other expenses.

Law enforcement and criminal justice major Jasper Fairman is one of those who received much-needed assistance from the relief fund. Fairman and his wife, then pregnant with their daughter and scheduled to deliver at the end of August, evacuated first to Lake Charles, La., but got flooded in and lost a vehicle when Harvey moved east. The family then traveled to Austin to stay with relatives but when they returned to the Houston area, their trailer was uninhabitable and Fairman didn't have the money for tuition.

"For three weeks, I couldn't work because of the storm. We evacuated, came back and I still couldn't work, but I had it in my mind to continue my education for this fall so I could stay on track toward my graduation," said Fairman, who was unable to secure financial aid in time to meet the payment deadline. He had just found out his classes had been dropped for non-payment when he learned about the Harvey relief fund and put in an application.

"I was getting in panic mode; I didn't want to drop," Fairman said. "But sure enough, I received a call saying, 'Don't worry about anything, your tuition will be paid and you'll be able to continue on with your classes.' Tears started rolling down my eyes. It's hard dealing with this issue and not knowing how you can make ends meet and continue on to your dreams. I'm thankful for the opportunity to be a recipient and thankful for Lee College having something like this for us."

Baytown native Anabel Briones, who also received help from the Harvey relief fund, graduated from Lee College with an Associate Degree of Nursing three years ago but returned to satisfy prerequisites for her bachelor's degree. She and her husband, a welding student at the college, evacuated their home in the Pine Meadows subdivision at the last minute to protect their young daughters as the water rose.

“When it was safe for us to come back home, I walked into my house and had the breakdown of my life. Everything we’ve been working so hard for was destroyed,” said Briones, a registered nurse who continued to work during Harvey but has since taken a leave of absence to focus on rebuilding her home.

Though they lost a car in the storm, are displaced and staying with relatives, and have been turned down for other forms of assistance, Briones and her husband are determined to stay in school.

“You get in a position where you think you have it all together, but one day is all it takes and you’re at nothing,” Briones said. “The help from Lee College meant a lot to me. We still have goals to reach and we can’t let one event take over our whole life. That’s our mentality and it’s going to be difficult, but we will get through this.”