

Five Years After Harvey

How Lee College's Efforts Helped Change Lives



This

week marks the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Harvey. The deadly storm devastated parts of the greater Houston area, including Baytown and its surrounding communities, and caused nearly \$125 billion in damage.

Almost immediately after the storm passed, a handful of Lee College employees mobilized to help students, faculty and staff, as well as community members who lost their homes. The gymnasium transformed into a shelter and distribution site for needy families. With the help of Red Cross and donations to Second Baptist Church, Harvey victims had beds to sleep on, blankets to cover themselves, food to eat, water to drink and clothes to wear.

Kristy Zamagne, administrative secretary in College Advancement, was one of the first Lee College employees on the front lines – ready to assist. In the days after Harvey, Zamagne was instrumental in getting the shelter set up and making sure fathers, mothers and their children were comfortable.

"Most people brought only a bag and a purse. They hadn't showered. They were hungry, and some just wanted to lay down," Zamagne recalled. "It was amazing to see how quickly everything came together to help the community."



Generous

donors and the Lee College Foundation stepped up as well — opening their hearts and wallets to raise more than \$100,000 and create the Lee College Foundation Harvey Relief Fund for students and staff. In addition, ExxonMobil also stepped up to assist by donating \$5,000 worth of gas cards.

"It became very clear, really quick that students needed help, and they needed help fast," recalled Kerri Hurlbut, donor and scholarship coordinator, Lee College Foundation. "We just did the best we could and helped as many people as possible." Kyle Grammond, a student at the time, was among those who received the much-needed assistance from the relief fund. Harvey destroyed the Baytown home he shared with his wife and two young daughters.

"I remember walking into our house for the first time and seeing the line on the wall where the water was," Grammond shared. "There were puddles of water on the floor, and we had no idea where or even how to begin cleaning up."

The Grammond family's temporary home for several months was an RV near the Lee College Liberty Center, where he could continue his studies, but the financial stress became so overwhelming that Grammond almost dropped out of school.

"I also remember thinking, 'There is no way I can go back to college this year. I don't have money to afford it and I don't have a dime when I am trying to rebuild our house'." But his wife and Lee College had a different plan.

"The Lee College Foundation really came through for our family in that moment by providing for us while keeping me in school," he said. "We received two distributions of funds which were a double dose of blessings."

Today, Grammond is living his dream of being a nurse. He graduated in May 2020 with his associate degree in nursing from the Lee College Nursing Program and is a psychiatric nurse at Baptist Beaumont Behavioral Health Center. Grammond is also studying to be a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner. And his family has grown since Harvey. He and his wife had a third child, a little boy.

"I am right where God wants me," Grammond shared. "He lays the path before us. All we have to do is follow it, and I am glad that Lee College was on my path."