

★ NEWS ★



POPLARVILLE - Mable Riles of Sones Chapel in Pearl River County had a host of Pearl River Community College instructors and students on her roof recently. The group volunteered to replace the 84-year-old Riles' roof, which was damaged by Hurricane Katrina. The group included, from left, Jarred Bragg and Dwight Sick of Bay St. Louis, Dale Miller, instructor in the Automation and Controls program at PRCC, Miller's his 7-year-old son, Cody, Leland Kennedy, instructor in the welding department at PRCC, Justin Mooney of Carriere, Anthony Vitale IV of McNeill, Dwight Lee of Leetown and Eric Anderson of Mobile, Ala.

PRCC students help provide Katrina victim with new roof

POPLARVILLE - Pearl River Community College students Jarred Bragg, Kyle Sick, Dwight Lee and Anthony Vitale IV say they all grew up being taught it was important to help other people.

They also believe people should give something back to their communities.

So when instructors Dale Miller and Leland Kennedy recently asked for volunteers to help re-roof 84-year-old Mable Riles' three-bedroom home in the Sones Chapel area of Pearl River County, they raised their hands.

Miller, instructor of Automation and Controls at PRCC, is one of Riles' neighbors. "I drove by her house one day and saw where her blue roof had blown off. She was fixing to lose everything she had," he said. "She had no insurance and she was not having much luck with FEMA. I got to talking to the kids about it one day. First one, then another, then another, said they wanted to help her. I didn't know what to expect when I first mentioned it."

He told Kennedy about it. Next thing Miller knew, students in Kennedy's welding program at PRCC heard about it and some of them wanted to help, including Bragg and Sick, who might have been excused if they had passed on helping someone else in need. You see, both are from Bay St. Louis in Hancock County. Both have families with homes that suffered extensive damage from Hurricane Katrina and are living in Federal Emergency Management Association trailers. Both have spent their share of time gutting damaged houses.

Yet both of them, who are dormitory residents at PRCC, found volunteering to replace a roof for someone they did not know gave them a sense of fulfillment and a sense of pride.

"I wanted to help because I know how it is, to be with no insurance," said Bragg, who lost his job at Casino Magic and his car to flood waters. "My (grandmother's) house was flooded and she had no insurance, and I had some friends who had no insurance on their homes. Our house had 14-15 feet of water in it. We had flood insurance, but no insurance on the contents. We lost everything inside."

Said Sick, "My dad's house flooded. My mom's house was 100 yards off the beach and was destroyed. We have a FEMA trailer at my dad's house now. Three of us are in it on the weekends and it's crowded. I wanted to help make a difference in someone's life."

Miller, Kennedy, Miller's 7-year-old son, Cody, and

PRCC's students - 11 in all - converged on Riles' roof early one January morning and finished the project the next day. The materials were donated.

"When Dale told me what they wanted to do, I asked the students who wanted to help," said Kennedy. "Actually, more of them wanted to help, but we had plenty of help already. It makes you feel good to see students wanting to make a difference in someone's life."

Riles found it difficult to hold back the tears as she prepared lunch for the workers in her home on John Amacker Road, where she has lived since 1974.

"I remember going through (Hurricane) Camille, but this storm was worse than Camille," she said, glancing to the heavens as hammers pounded away above her. "This storm was scary. My niece was staying here with me. It messed up all my roofing, and I had sheet rock damage in my front rooms."

"I couldn't afford insurance. I tried to get some help with a grant, but they told me they couldn't provide me with anything. I appreciate what my church did to help me. The Lord has blessed me to still be here. When Dale told me they wanted to do this for me, I told him I couldn't pay them for it. He told me they wanted to do this for me. I can't tell you how happy I am to have these people from the college helping me."

Miller said he believes anyone who gets involved in volunteer service will reap benefits far beyond graduation from PRCC. He recommends volunteering to all students. "Despite the fact that it is time consuming, it is rewarding to be selfless and see others benefit from your work," he said.

Lee and Vitale agree. "To help an elderly lady like that makes you feel pretty good," said Vitale, of McNeill. "I like to help others when I can. I am glad they asked me. She was pretty happy about it."

Added Lee, who is also an electrician from Leetown, "I was off work that day, and I thought it would be a good way to help out. I felt pretty good about it when we were done. The roof looks pretty good."

Miller said this was a tremendous opportunity for his students.

"Sometimes it take a disaster like this to spark an outpouring of volunteer service from these students," said Miller. "They want to help out in their community. Most of them just want to be asked."

"That's all."



POPLARVILLE - Dale Miller, instructor of Automation and Controls at PRCC, poses with Mable Riles of Sones Chapel while PRCC students work to replace her torn roof. Miller said he believes anyone who gets involved in volunteer service will reap benefits far beyond graduation.



POPLARVILLE - From left, Anthony Vitale IV of McNeill, Eric Anderson of Mobile, Ala. and Dwight Lee of Leetown, PRCC students in the Automation and Controls program, work on 84-year-old Mable Riles' roof in Sones Chapel in January. PRCC students volunteered to help replace Riles's roof, which was damaged by Hurricane Katrina.



POPLARVILLE - Dwight Lee (left) of Leetown and Eric Anderson of Mobile, Ala., PRCC students in the Automation and Controls program, work on 84-year-old Mable Riles' roof in Sones Chapel in January. Lee, Anderson and other PRCC students volunteered to help replace Riles's roof, which was damaged by Hurricane Katrina.



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