

North Chicago, IL – Christmas came early for four families relocated to North Chicago and Waukegan after Hurricane Katrina destroyed their homes. U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk and his Student Leadership Advisory Board surprised the families with gifts donated by high school students in the 10th District. The gifts were delivered at a surprise holiday party hosted by the Public Action to Deliver Shelter and Support Services (PADS).

“Thousands of Americans and so many families along the Gulf Coast suffered tremendous loss in the wake of Hurricane Katrina,” said Kirk. “For the families that relocated to our communities, these gifts collected by high school students from across the district, express our thoughts and prayers as they rebuild their lives. I am very proud of the young leaders that coordinated this effort – they reflect the generosity of our neighbors and the spirit of the season.”

Kirk’s Student Leadership Advisory Board, made up of junior and senior class student body presidents from 10th District high schools, decided to organize the gift giving campaign after learning several families had relocated to Lake County following Hurricane Katrina. Working with Congressman Kirk and PADS, they located four families that needed some holiday cheer. The student advisory board spent the last two weeks collecting video games, DVDs, gift certificates, toys, and clothing from classmates. Stevenson High School senior Andrew Adair, Student Leadership Advisory Board president, helped lead the effort to collect gifts from students.

“Although we cannot replace what these families may have lost during Hurricane Katrina, the least we can do is provide a little holiday cheer and let them know our community cares for them” Adair said.

Kirk and the students delivered presents to six adults and twenty children displaced by Hurricane Katrina. One of the families, L’ashandra and Ronnie Everett along with their seven children, were trapped in Mississippi after Katrina battered their home. L’ashandra’s mother, who lives in Illinois, drove to Mississippi and brought them back to Lake County. All of their kids are enrolled in school in Waukegan. Ronnie, a minister, has been traveling back and forth from Mississippi. While he appreciates the high school students’ efforts to bring them an early Christmas, his best Christmas gift may have come earlier this week when the Federal Emergency Management Agency informed him that he and his family can return to their Mississippi home in three weeks.

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