

U.S.

Louisiana Volunteers Serve Up Sustenance, Solace to Harvey Evacuees

Bringing jambalaya, pulled pork, and support to residents leaving Orange, Texas.



Volunteers from the men's clubs of St. Margaret Mary Church and Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Slidell, La., preparing hot meals for displaced residents in Orange, Texas. PHOTO: QUINT FORGEY/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Quint Forgey

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ORANGE, Texas—A small outdoor shopping center just off Interstate 10 here has become a major muster point for evacuees of this storm-battered town.

On Thursday, Orange County ordered mandatory evacuations for portions of the county due to the destruction of Tropical Storm Harvey, bringing residents to two staging areas before sending them to shelters across the border in Louisiana.

The men's clubs of St. Margaret Mary Church and Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Slidell, La., about 250 miles away, have set up camp in the strip mall, preparing and distributing hundreds of hot meals to displaced Orange residents.

Some of those leaving haven't eaten in three days, said Bill Borchert, a 53-year-old volunteer. They're relieved to take a bite out of an apple or banana, but "when we tell them we got

jambalaya and pulled pork and vegetables, they get excited,” he said.

Both places of worship in Slidell were “hammered” by the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina, said Mr. Borchert. “We know what these people are feeling,” he added.

The roughly two dozen volunteers came equipped with five trailers carrying enough food for 6,000 hot meals, including 1,000 pounds of hamburger and 300 pieces of filet mignon.

They also brought a massive smoker that can cook 350 pounds of meat every two hours, a catering trailer to prepare roughly 125 pounds of jambalaya at a time, and culinary machinery that can shred a pork shoulder in 20 seconds.

There are always roughly 30 evacuees queued up, waiting their turn to receive a styrofoam box of food. “We haven’t cleared the line yet,” said Fred Wallace, a 57-year-old volunteer and Air Force veteran.

More than 5,000 people have been evacuated from Orange County in recent days, and numbers from Friday are still unclear, said an officer with the Calcasieu Parish Sheriff’s Office.

The men’s clubs were originally bound for Grace Community Church in Houston, but flooding at several exits along Interstate 10 Thursday evening blocked them from traveling further westward into Beaumont, Port Arthur and other affected areas.

Instead, they began feeding Orange residents that night, serving 600 people. That many meals were already distributed by lunchtime Friday.

The volunteers—who are anticipating that the relief release of water from the Toledo Bend Reservoir could prevent them from leaving Orange for the foreseeable future—also set up a satellite dish so evacuees could enjoy television while snacking.

They weren’t able to watch the New Orleans Saints play the Baltimore Ravens Thursday night, but made sure to turn the channel to other sporting events.

“We don’t want to put on the news,” Mr. Wallace said. “They’re living it.”