

Community comes to aid of hurricane survivors

By Sabina Mollot

Numerous community groups have banded together to help Gulf state residents affected by Hurricane Katrina. One of those groups told T&V on Monday that it had received hundreds of boxes worth of donated clothes, toys and household items and were expecting to get even more before the items will be sent to Mississippi and Louisiana on Tuesday.

Arlene Harrison, president of the Gramercy Park Block Association, said that since the story on local hurricane relief efforts ran in last week's issue of T&V, the response from residents of Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper Village and Gramercy Park has been "overwhelming."

"There was a huge response from Stuyvesant Town," said Harrison, "and

we've been spreading the word at local synagogues and churches. It just keeps getting bigger and bigger. I must receive over 100 calls a day, and a lot of them are from Stuyvesant Town-Peter Cooper."

Harrison, who freely admitted bossing around all the neighborhood kids—including the children of Gramercy Park actress Uma Thurman—to get them to donate, too, said the effort was worth it.

"Every kid is making their own individual boxes," she said. "I told them these kids' toys were all washed away."

Among the items Harrison and her partner in the drive efforts, Rev. Thomas Pike of Calvary Church, are collecting include clothing, household items and medical supplies,

which they are getting from an upstate hospital.

Meanwhile, the list of needed items, which Harrison gets from residents of Louisiana and Mississippi who have relatives in Gramercy Park, changes daily.

"We're trying to be responsive to their needs, not just give them clothes," she said. However, a recent donation of abandoned clothes from Gramercy dry cleaner, Cameo, was still more than welcome.

The items currently being asked for include air mattresses for children and adults, since many people in affected areas have begun camping out in the lots that used to be their homes. Other necessities include work gloves, bug repellent, batteries and cleaning supplies such as bleach, "things you don't normally think of," said Harrison.

She added that she and Pike will try to get discounts from the big box stores that sell those items, now that some, such as K-Mart are finally opening their doors to

customers again. Cash donations are of course more than welcome, with every cent going to the Neighbors Helping Neighbors organization.

The drop-off site for the clothing/household item/toy drive is at the Calvary parish house at 61 Gramercy Park North. The donated items, meanwhile, will then be sent in style to two churches, one in Mississippi, the other Louisiana, via a moving truck that normally delivers clothing for fashion designer Marc Jacobs. The designer is paying for the use of the truck while it's in use for the relief efforts.

Another problem faced by the hurricane survivors—homelessness—wasn't ignored by the community, either.

Gramercy Park's Edwin Gould Foundation, an organization that helps disadvantaged youths has a facility in Rockland County, which is currently empty and unused. The 165-acre space includes a building with recreational space, a gym, classrooms and of-

fices, and according to Harrison, it would make a great shelter.

"This campus can easily hold up to 200 people," she said, noting that she and Pike are currently on the lookout for a government agency that would be willing to supply the management services to oversee the facility while families are being housed there.

The Red Cross has already turned down the project, but Harrison said she's hoping The Salvation Army will agree to help.

This may seem like a lot of work, but according to GPBA's fearless leader, it's just phase one. Another drive is planned for October. Anyone who wants to help or who would like to receive daily e-mail updates on the relief efforts can contact Harrison at (212) 260-3875.

Donations of items or money can be dropped off on Monday, September 26, Tuesday, September 27 or Wednesday, September 28 at Calvary Church between the hours of 10 a.m. and 12 noon. Multiple items should be left in boxes with an inventory list written on top of the box.

Response to hurricane relief 'overwhelming' from residents in ST, PCV and Gramercy.

—ARLENE HARRISON