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## Help Waveland during holidays

Thursday, December 15, 2005

Wayland's first town-wide effort to support its sister city, Waveland, Miss., has been a tremendous success. Due to the generous outpouring of donations and monetary contributions, a truck of household supplies to outfit the FEMA trailers where many Waveland residents now call home has been just about filled.

The mission is to partner with the people of Waveland on a long-term basis, offering support and establishing personal connections that will last well into the future. As the residents return to Waveland and the town slowly rebuilds, it is ever more important to maintain our support and reach out to those in need. In the short term, the holidays are approaching quickly, and many Wayland residents have suggested that this is a perfect time to express the true spirit of the holidays.

In the same vein, the officials of Waveland want to ensure that Santa does not forget its families, and in fact have collected hundreds of "Dear Santa" letters from scattered Waveland families who eloquently articulate their hurricane experiences as well as their holiday wishes. The power of their words is enormous, and the following excerpts from these letters reinforce the great emotional and material needs of these people.

"What we had spent our entire lives working for had been lost to Hurricane Katrina in a matter of hours. Our entire community that we enjoyed so much was taken away. The church where generations of our family had been baptized, married and even buried was no longer there. The places we shopped, our favorite restaurants, and breathtaking views of the beach where we enjoyed walks with our grandchildren had vanished."

"We rode out the storm at NASA and were safe, we thought. Until a tornado took the roof off the building we were staying in. Came home to see our house still standing but everything inside was destroyed ... including baby pictures, precious memories and priceless heirlooms. But we all survived and stayed together. We probably will never be back to the normalcy that was before the storm. But I do believe we will be better off by the lessons we have learned in the aftermath of the storm. Material things are just that ... material, and can be replaced. What really matters in life is family, friends and one another. And the love that is shared."

"At 4 a.m. Katrina awoke us. By 9 a.m. we gathered in the hallway in fear of tornadoes. At 11:15 a.m. we heard a terrifying noise. By surprise to all of us, it was a surge of water coming in from the back. It was whitecaps with fish jumping. The water came in so fast that we put the kids and the dogs on the bed till we could open the attic. Our small dog jumped off the bed and got lost in the water. Finally, our daughter said the water was going down. When the water dropped enough, my husband opened the door and the pressure pulled the water out like a vacuum cleaner. It sucked windows out and floated off everything that was not secured. We lost a lot, but we are so thankful we have our lives. Our family is more than any home, autos or money."

"Thank you very much. We gratefully appreciate all that you can do for us. We never expected anything like this to happen to us. Our father is very sick and the hurricane didn't help. He has had two heart attacks within a two-month period since the hurricane. We've had to sleep in tents in our driveway with no water or electricity. It has been and will be very difficult, but we will make it through."

If you would like to adopt a family for Christmas, please stop by the Public Safety Building on Friday, Dec. 16 from noon to 4 p.m. to pick up a "Dear Santa" letter. Each one of us can make a connection. Each one of us can make a difference.

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