



Another spring break has come and gone, and the Associated General Contractors student chapter (AGC) has again spent the week helping people in need. The previous three years, the AGC has spent their spring break week helping those on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, rebuilding in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This year, the student organization decided to work a little closer to home, and help the residents in Eastern Iowa rebuild after the flooding over the summer.

This year's trip, like those in previous years, was funded by donations from private construction contractors, Iowa State University, and families of AGC members. The AGC of Iowa and the Master Builders of Iowa also gave much needed support and encouragement.

Through coordination with the United Way of East Central Iowa, thirty-five students from the AGC spent the week in Palo, just up the Cedar River from Cedar Rapids. Palo is a small community of nearly 1,000 people that was hit especially hard by the summer floods. Many homes in town, even nine months after the floods, are still uninhabitable. Many of the residents were running out of funding. Potentially more threatening, many were losing hope that they would be able to move back in to their flood-damaged homes.

In the week that the AGC was in town, they worked with fifteen different families. The various scopes of work included framing, subflooring, exterior sheathing, siding, roofing, insulation, drywall, cabinet installation, flooring, door installation, and deck building. Some of our highlighted projects include:

- Dwayne and Sheryl Myres – The AGC began working on this house on Tuesday. By the time we left Friday morning, we had sheathed the exterior, laid subflooring inside, installed fascia along the roof, completely shingled the roof, hung siding, and installed windows and doors. In just three days, we took his house from unlivable, to almost completely dried-in.
- Jerry and Sandy Wood – We began working on the Wood's home on Saturday, and in just a few days installed wood flooring, set doors and windows, and installed kitchen cabinets. Our members truly made their house a home. Sandy told us over and over again how much we had inspired her. She told us that the town of Palo was in such great need, and for the AGC to be able to deliver was absolutely phenomenal.
- Jim and Jean West – This elderly couple's home had water up to the bottoms of the floor joists, and Jean said she considered herself fortunate. We worked in their basement for two days, framing walls and hanging sheetrock. She kept telling us stories of how, before the flood, her grandchildren would come over and play downstairs, but they hadn't been able to do that because the basement was so badly damaged. With just a little more work, their grandchildren will have their playroom back. Though Jean couldn't be there the last day we worked on her home, she left a note that read, "Thank you for all your help. You have no idea how much it is appreciated."
- Bryon and Tina Ruby – Since the flooding, this couple had been living in the same bedroom as their two kids. The AGC was able to finish their entire basement in just three days. The Ruby's



couldn't afford to hire anyone to finish their basement and the AGC was one of their only hopes for being able to get their lives back to normal.

- Carrie Ford – Carrie is a single mother who, before the flood, never received any help from anybody; she didn't ask for any. After the flood, she struggled to live a normal life with her daughter. Her deck, which is her only point of entry for the house, was torn apart after her house was gutted by another volunteer group. She and her daughter couldn't enter the house safely. The AGC was able to repair her deck. Our members also hung drywall in her kitchen and bathroom. As we were finishing work, her daughter played on the newly completed deck. Carrie excitedly told us we gave her much more than she ever expected.

The homeowners from each home were tremendously grateful for our work. We received many comments, not only from the people whose homes we worked on, but also from other residents of the community. Many Palo residents would stop by our jobsites and thank us for the work we were doing. One homeowner even started calling us her kids. Some called us their angels. But our overall favorite was the "Halo over Palo." Several said that the work we were doing was phenomenal, but the hope and inspiration we gave the whole community was even more powerful.

The residents of Palo weren't the only ones this trip affected. It affected our own members as well. Our leaders told the group the Friday before we started working, that this trip will change the way you see the world. On Thursday evening, as we worked well past dark, several members of our group reflected that the experience had indeed changed them. When asked their thoughts of the trip, our members answered that it was better than they could have ever expected.

Many of our members are convinced that it was the connection between the students from the AGC and residents of Palo that made the experience so powerful.

We worked for six days in Palo, and put in over 2100 hours of work. None of us received a single dollar for our work, but the warm welcome, the heartfelt appreciation, and the wonderful people clearly demonstrate that our toils were not without reward.

Though our group did not work for recognition, we did receive quite a bit of recognition during our week of work. Landon Streit, the trip coordinator, was quoted in the Monday edition of the Cedar Rapids Gazette. Iowa Governor Chet Culver stopped by one of the homes we were working in on Wednesday. On Thursday, an official from the City of Palo presented our group with a certificate of appreciation for going above and beyond during our week of work. The certificate was nice, but the three bags of homemade cookies that were also delivered on Thursday were pretty nice as well.

What was the best part of the trip?

"It's hard to express how amazing it feels to help improve someone's life, to give them hope again, or to make them laugh as they struggle to recover from such a catastrophe." – Anna Claussen, Junior



“There was no better feeling in the world than seeing someone’s house brought one step closer to normalcy.” – Chris Rosso, Junior

“We gave so much hope and inspiration to people who had lost it.” – Landon Streit, Senior

“For me, the best part of the trip was easy. It was the relationships that were built, not only between us and the homeowners, but also with other people on the trip.” – Austin Davis, Senior

Would you consider going on another AGC spring break trip?

“Yes, the bonding between members of AGC and the home owners, along with meeting people who enjoy doing the same thing as you would make me want to go again.” – Jordan Einck, Freshman

“Yes, it was a great way to spend spring break. The community was so appreciative; I was proud to be helping them.” – Amanda Hansen, Freshman

How has this trip changed you?

“Whenever you help people it changes you. It makes you think about what is really important in life. When a family almost breaks down in tears just because a few college students helped out in their house, you realize how much of a difference you can make by just working hard and lending a helping hand.” – Chris Daniels, Senior

“It has helped me to understand how different people think - everyone from my fellow students to the homeowners. To see owners start to cry over the work we had done for them was amazing. I will not soon forget those moments.” – Dave Kubik, Senior

“It showed me that even though I don't think I'm able to make much of a difference, the residents definitely thought otherwise.” – Nick Goedken, Junior

“I never knew what an impact so few people could have on an entire community. I have a feeling every citizen of Palo now knows who the ISU AGC is, and would welcome us back at any time.” – Austin Davis, Senior

Is there any other comment you have about the trip?

“My only regret about the trip is that we couldn't have stayed longer, and rebuilt the entire town. But in the time we did stay, we got an incredible amount done. The people of Palo see this effort, and the hope and inspiration we have given them is more powerful than anything else we could have done.” – Landon Streit, Senior



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“Don't let the opportunity to grow as a student, as a friend, and as a community leader slip through your grasps. I myself will not ever have the opportunity to go on an AGC trip again, and cannot express in words how deeply it hurts to know this. I can only hope that in some way, shape, or form, our club will carry on this ConE tradition in rightly serving the communities around us.” – Mike Grim, Senior