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NSU College of Optometry Focuses on Katrina Aid at Camp Gruber

Doctors, students, and technicians from Northeastern State University's College of Optometry recently came together to make the plight of hurricane Katrina evacuees a little more bearable. The 1,500 evacuees housed at Camp Gruber were invited to a free eye exam and a complimentary pair of glasses.

Using the vehicle originally purposed for the successful Vision in Preschoolers program, NSU's optometry students and physicians traveled to the camp to volunteer and aid evacuees. Using their own time, the volunteers are helping as many people as possible.

"If they have any indication of problems they're getting screened," said Jon Garcia, biomedical engineer with the college.

In addition, the college has worked with optometric companies, securing the donations of thousands of frames.

"Sandy Duncan with Duffens Optical has worked to get about \$45,000 worth of lenses and frames donated to the over 250 people we've treated," said Dr. George Foster, dean of the College of Optometry.

Similarly, pharmaceutical companies have generously donated medication to evacuees.

"We worked a deal with a pharmaceutical company to give medicine to people in need. Many of the on-site pharmacies don't have medication for glaucoma patients, and we've been able to help with that," said Garcia.

Following some poorly coordinated efforts at relief and evacuation, NSU's contribution is small, but much needed and well received. The college has kept a presence at Camp Gruber almost non-stop since the need arose, with three to eight students a day volunteering and they intend to keep staff on site until the need for care is fulfilled.

"It has been a privilege to be of service to these people who have been through so much," said Foster.

This sentiment is mirrored in the gratitude and hope of resilient survivors.

With a little luck, and maybe a new pair of glasses, evacuees will be able to see a brighter future very soon.

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