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Displaced by Katrina

Graduate student sends help home

By Wendy Wikstrom (Snodgrass)
Contributing writer

Kellen Patterson has been at WSU for three weeks and already is making a difference. She was a University of New Orleans graduate student — one of only two graduate students to escape to WSU after Hurricane Katrina. (A third may join them in spring semester, said **Steve Burkett** of the Graduate School). But her concern remains back home, as evidenced by her quick involvement from Pullman with charities aiding hurricane survivors.

Her cousin, **Charles Hemphill**, is a space allocation manager for Capital Planning and Development. Patterson credits his offer of a place to stay and his overall support with making her decision to transfer a comfortable one. WSU is a welcome refuge after what she's been through. She describes the 24 hours before she left town as a series of warning signs that became much clearer in hindsight:

"I was out with my roommate that night for a farewell party — here we are, seeing people getting ready to leave and boarding up their homes and stores, but at the same time there were bars and restaurants still open and people still operating as normal. It should have hit home when I realized Café du Monde was shutting down — they're infamous for their open hours.

"On Sunday morning my mom asked my plans. I said I would drive home, but she got me a plane ticket instead and I left at 10:30 a.m. So on the way to the airport, I had a quarter tank of gas when another realization hit me that this IS big because nearby gas stations were already boarded up.

"I had mixed emotions when I went home to Houston. My roommate was still in New Orleans and was hiding in our attic with the cats. I was angry that it was happening, but I knew it was a natural disaster and what could

you do? Fortunately, I was able to help a friend's family who stayed at my parent's home for a few days."

Patterson also went to the Astrodome to help displaced families get situated. And she's been helping hurricane survivors long distance since she's been at WSU. She has volunteered for two different charities: Backpacks for Hope and Operation Good Samaritan.

She expects to finish her master's degree in May 2007, but says any decision about returning to the University of New Orleans is still up in the air. Her degree there was in urban and regional planning. At WSU she is working toward an equivalent degree in environmental science and regional planning. She considers she might be able to exercise either degree eventually to contribute to the reconstruction of New Orleans.

In the meantime, she has met four or five people at WSU whom she already considers friends. She finds the Pullman community warm and welcoming and, as she's already demonstrated, is working to invest the most in her time here.

"I thank those at WSU for extending their arms and embracing me through my journey," she said.

