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News for NOMADS feature page

NOMADS AT HEART

'Let George do it' is key to 2006 successful reunion

In some circles, the phrase "Let George do it" refers to passing the buck, but it took on a whole new meaning at the 2006 Reunion, after George and Rubye Russell teamed up with George and Judy Tuttle to spearhead the annual get-together. **Attending** were 348 people, with 173 rigs, from 26 states.

Reunion opened with **hearty singing** of the hymns of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley, with anecdotes and historic tidbits shared by song leader Dick Bulkeley. Gracing the stage was a new **NOMADS banner**, handmade by Amy Campbell and bearing the new NOMADS logo. After a **welcome** song by Illinois NOMADS, board Chairman Butch Halsted received a rousing greeting, and voiced thanks to everyone, and to God, for a "near 100% recovery," after a brain aneurysm suffered last summer.

Early risers were rewarded daily with intriguing **Bible studies** by Rev. Gene Wengert.

Challenging and inspiring **daily devotions** were offered by Pastor Ron Chase of Bethany UMC, Columbia IL; Pontiac District Superintendent Keith Zimmerman; and Sacramento Methodist Assembly Executive Director Jim Hengstenberg. Chase drew a comparison between wanderers and NOMADS, saying, "God has a purpose for you and you've reached out and responded." He invited NOMADS to park at his church, promising, "We'll keep a light on for you."

The **Reunion Men's Chorus**, directed by Tom Iverson, sang on two occasions during reunion.

Workshops started with a Fire & Life Safety Seminar and offered, to everyone's delight, hand crafts, NOMADS leadership; using tools; dealing with electricity and honing computer skills.

Promotions Chair Dorothy Bondurant reported the new NOMADS brochure and DVD are available from the Sacramento, NM office, and that a Promotions link on the web site provides materials for making presentations. "Now that you have all these tools," Bondurant challenged us, "take a proactive stance and seek out opportunities to tell the NOMADS story."

Tuesday evening **entertainers** were Joy and Roger Perry, pastors at Aldersgate UMC in Marion, IL. They witnessed to their faith with blue grass and Gospel music and a hilarious skit. Wednesday night's Ham-O-Rama talent show included vocal solos, mountain dulcimers, an accordion, Indian flutes (including a nose flute), guitar, a skit and a surprise appearance by Minnie-Ha-Ha.

The live and silent **auctions and country store** brought lots of laughs, along with \$12,528.03 (including a \$5,000 donation) for the NOMADS Materials Fund. A big thank you goes to all the generous contributors and to auctioneer Wayne Mahan.

Thursday morning Jane Waddock and Rubye Russell led our **memorial service**, lighting candles as the roll was called: Carol Studebaker, Gene Brown, Carter Crawford, John Herman, Jim Starkey, Everett Mowrey, Bill Renken and Dr. William Powell. As names were read, NOMADS who had worked on a project with this person stood in respect. A memorial butterfly was given to the loved ones of each. Rubye Russell blessed prayer quilts to be given to NOMADS undergoing difficult times, and Jane Waddock read a poem entitled "A Life Well Lived."

Needs, insights shared from Gulf Coast work experience

“A three-month ‘high,’” was Arlin Kiel’s description of “three wonderful, glorious months helping others on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Last October, NOMAD Jim Traviss asked Arlin and Sue to join a work group at Caswell Springs UMC, near Moss Point. Most of the crew were NOMADS and after two weeks, he said, “We knew in our hearts that NOMADS needed to be involved in the recovery.”

Revolving Team Projects were organized and, since early March, 114 NOMADS worked at Bay St. Louis and Caswell Springs sites. Said Kiel, “Believe me, YOU made a difference in many lives in Mississippi! It was a life-changing experience for many reasons,” including these that he shared:

1) “We witnessed destruction, devastation and suffering that we could never have imagined.” More than half a million homes were destroyed or seriously damaged. Millions left homeless – even some of our own NOMADS. Untold numbers of businesses and jobs gone. “I think every one of us has shed many tears on this journey.

2) “We saw the amazing spirit and faith of the people of Mississippi.” An elderly man, tears welling in his eyes, recalled a narrow escape--the entire first floor of their home was washed away while they huddled upstairs. His wife fell, severely cutting her ankle. Before she got medical treatment, infection set in, and she nearly lost her leg. “But we’re not whiners,” he said proudly. “And FEMA has done an amazing job, when you consider the unprecedented magnitude of the losses from this storm.”

3) Kiel commended WLOX-TV, Biloxi, for telling the real stories of Hurricane Katrina. “The national drive-by media was woefully incomplete and misleading,” he said. The Gulf Coast people are strong, resilient, and ready to get on with life in a positive way. WLOX reported honestly and completely, including news of “volunteers’ Herculean work, many involving Methodists.

“Finally, perhaps the greatest miracle we witnessed was the Christian community’s massive outpouring of help.” More than a million Christians of all denominations, from around the world, poured into the region to lend a hand. “We often heard, ‘Without the church’s efforts, Mississippi would not be where it is today.’ And we were a part of this flood of aid and support.

“I’m extremely proud of my fellow NOMADS, for your part in this,” Kiel said. “85-year-old Mildred told us, ‘God sent you all to help me. Some day he will send someone to help you, when you need it.’ ” When feeling discouraged or inadequate for the task, he said. “I remembered a note from Miz Nettie, saying ‘You gave me hope for the future.’ Hope for the future – what greater gift can we give?

“God was clearly in charge” of this project, he said. “How could it be any other way?

“We ALL had a marvelous experience, but the task of rebuilding has only begun. The work will go on for years, while many of our brothers and sisters continue to suffer. NOMADS are committed to being involved in this effort, Kiel said. Six three-week projects are slated on the Gulf Coast this fall, in Biloxi, in Bay St. Louis and at Caswell Springs. Can YOU help?

“Next spring, an RTP will again be offered at Caswell Springs. For 12 weeks, you may work for varying periods of time, helping these wonderful people get their lives and homes back together.”

Also, our Board is establishing a permanent Disaster Response Committee with adequate funds to be on sites soon after a major disaster, with host locations for NOMADS teams. The idea is to move in as soon as rebuilding can begin. “We believe this is an important new direction for us, as NOMADS.”

Curt Cruff spoke of working six months at an Ocean Springs MS UMC. “I cried more than I had since I was a little boy,” he said. “When Mississippi is back on its feet, it will be because of the church-based organizations” that showed up and helped.

From the receiving end of the situation, NOMAD Bob Delcuze of Bay St. Louis. said, “On behalf of the thousands on the Gulf Coast who have been helped by church-based organization, I thank you.”