

Illinois students send flood relief to Louisiana peers

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SORRENTO, LOUISIANA – Louisiana fifth graders received some much needed flood relief from their peers in Illinois last month.

Students from four science classes at Galvez Primary, Lake Elementary and St. Amant Primary, located just south of Baton Rouge, were surprised with backpacks from schools in Metro East St. Louis filled with water conservation items and personalized letters of support from peers who know a thing or two about flooding.

The Ascension Public School students, displaced from their schools by summer flooding, are currently attending classes on the former campus of River Parishes Community College.

“Our students were thrilled to receive these special backpacks from the Swarovski Waterschool program,” said St. Amant Primary Principal Paisley Morgan. “They were especially touched by the personalized letters written by other students expressing their love and support during this challenging time.”

The initiative was aimed at empowering local students to make a positive impact on the lives of fellow students downriver, provide support for flood victims in Louisiana, and create a dialogue between the two based on mutual experiences and understanding. It was made possible in partnership with the newly-established Swarovski Waterschool USA Mississippi River, headquartered at Lewis and Clark Community College's National Great Rivers Research and Education Center.

In October, fifth grade students at North Elementary School in Alton, Illini Middle School in Jerseyville, Lincoln Middle School in East St. Louis and Lovejoy Middle School in Brooklyn wrote letters and stuffed each backpack with care items such as soap, reusable paper towels, books, notebooks, pencils, small toys and reusable sport bottles, each correlating with one of the Swarovski Waterschool's three pillars – access to safe water, water education and sanitation, hygiene and health. At the end of the month, Natalie Marioni, NGRREC Director of Environmental Education and Citizen Science, delivered the backpacks in person with L&C Horticulture Manager Ethan Braasch.

“While in Louisiana, we had conversations with a number of local people still displaced from their homes,” Marioni said. “They were living in hotels because they were unable to return to their flooded homes or had not yet received assistance for alternate housing due to the flooding. When they learned what we were doing, they said the impact from the project would not only affect the students, but would send a ripple effect of support into the community.”

“My students were so excited to see the letters that were written to them,” said Galvez Primary Principal Toni Hardy. “Those letters made this donation so meaningful. Someone really cared about what they were going through.”

Participating teachers at both ends of the project received the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' One Mississippi curriculum guide, which contains lessons in science, history and culture pertaining to the Mississippi River, to help bring the project into perspective for the students.

“It is overwhelming how people have reached out to all of the flood victims in Louisiana,” said Lake Elementary Principal Jay Benoit. “This is a very meaningful way to show support and create a dialogue among students and teachers.”



The newest Swarovski Waterschool at NGRREC is the first and only one of its kind in North America and the only one located on the Mississippi River, at the confluence of the Illinois, Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. The Swarovski Waterschool program, which has footholds situated along many great rivers of the world – the Danube (Austria), Ganges (India), Yangtze (China), Nile (Uganda), Amazon (Brazil) and now the Mississippi (United States) –educates children ages 8-15 and their communities about the ecological, economic, social and cultural issues that affect water use on a local and global level, and provides clean drinking water and sanitation in schools and communities across the globe.

Multiple partners up and down the Mississippi River sponsored the backpack project through fiscal assistance, donated items and logistical support, including Swarovski, Lewis and Clark Community College, the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center, Associated Professional Educators of Louisiana, Ascension Public Schools, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville STEM Center, Illinois American Water, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Cherry Lake Publishing.

To learn more about The Swarovski Waterschool, visit www.swarovskigroup.com/S/aboutus/Swarovski_Waterschool.en.html. Learn more about NGRREC at www.ngrrrec.org and Ascension Public Schools at www.apsb.org.

For more photos from this project, visit <https://flic.kr/s/aHskK4YVeW>.

