



NWI Food Bank aids New Orleans

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Julian Samaniego's trip to New Orleans in March exceeded his expectations.

Samaniego was a driver with the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana, which took more than 7,000 pounds of food and 50 volunteers to the hurricane-ravaged area.

"I was expecting something that I wasn't ready for," Samaniego said. "I was not prepared to see the massive devastation with empty lots where homes once stood and businesses no longer are, and where they use empty parking lots to put up trailer homes for people who had lost their homes.

"I actually stood next to a wall that ran next to the expressway, and you can see the watermarks where it started to recede. It was breathtaking to stand and see that the whole city was underneath that much water."

Food Bank Executive Director Angie Williams, who has traveled to the site four times since Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, described the trip as "emotional, moving and humbling."

"You can't help but feel compassion for them and the tragedy that has affected the area," Williams said. "It is still mind boggling that, after all these years, there are still people not in their homes."

Volunteers from the food bank and St. John the Evangelist Church in St. John worked in teams. Men rehabbed home interiors while women painted and tended to exterior projects.

It was the first time the group hit the road with a mobile food pantry.

Alicia Sulls said the overstuffed truck was cleared in half an hour.

"We gave a lot of food away, and there were a lot of mothers and their children asking for diapers," she said. "It was sad to see that and yet it was a joy to be able to help somebody."

Samaniego said the line of people was "unbelievable, and being in the situation they were in, they were so appreciative that we came down and handed out what we did."

Emotionally impacted, the volunteers said they would make a return trip if the opportunity presented itself.

"It made me realize and appreciate the little things I have in life because there are people down there that have lost everything," Samaniego said. "I've learned to be grateful for what I have."

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