

Concordia Helps Hurricane Victims

continued ▲ from Front

union account in New Orleans.

Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church, a mostly African-American congregation in Portland, donated money for her clothing and she was given aid from the Red Cross to help her get back on her feet. When she heard Concordia University was offering limited scholarships, she applied. She was given school supplies, books, a dorm room and tuition. Her generous roommates even surprised her with a room makeover.

"I'm just so thankful to everyone helping me," Calvin said, expressing sorrow for the children, women and elderly people who lost everything they had.

Although Calvin said she'd miss the friendly, southern hospitality of New Orleans, not to mention its food and strong sense of history, she has no plans to move back.

"I don't want to put myself in that situation again," she said.

Portland natives Alexis McCoy and Ismaelite Saint Felix were both freshmen at Xavier University, having moved into the dorms two weeks before the floodwaters from Katrina wiped out the city. They assumed the 400 students living in campus dorms would be moved to another school immediately if the hurricane hit. Instead, they were told to move to the top floors of their building. They were given flashlights and the power went out.

"The storm was coming—all you heard was wind," McCoy said.

Felix held onto her blanket and a couple of suitcases for the next



PHOTO BY KATHERINE BLACKMORE/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Concordia University is providing free financial assistance to Alexis McCoy (left) and Ismaelite Saint Felix, who arrived on the northeast Portland campus after Hurricane Katrina displaced them.

few days while the students hung around the dorms, waiting for an answer.

Eventually, when phone service was available, Felix was able to make a quick call to her mother to tell her "it's not that bad." Assuming school would start back up again soon, Felix continued to do her homework because she didn't want to be behind in class.

Then the levee broke and water began to rise. The showers and toilets stopped working. With worries and tension growing, rest wasn't easy to come by.

"We just kept telling ourselves 'at least we're alive.' If I woke up and saw the sun was shining, I was grateful for that," Felix said.

Thursday morning, girls were woken by the shouts of "Let's go, the Coast Guard's outside!" They gathered their things, went down the stairs and walked outside into water that was about three inches above the ankle. (The water level around campus eventually rose to about six feet.) The students placed their belongings on floating chairs and were rescued by boats fitted for approximately 12 people, including luggage.

The Xavier students were then taken to the I-10 highway, where they waited 12 hours until they were picked up by buses and escorted to safety by National Guard units and Louisiana State Police. During their waiting time, Rev. Jessie Jackson came to say a prayer and asked the crowd if they were just happy to be alive.

The buses then transported students either to Grambling State

University, about 5 hours northwest of New Orleans, or Southern University in Baton Rouge, an hour and a half northwest, depending on individual destinations.

When the students were rushed onto the buses, they were told to lay flat on the floor for protection. Angry residents, they said, had been randomly shooting guns to try to get a ride.

"It was really scary because you didn't know what was going to happen to you," McCoy said.

With McCoy at Southern University and Felix and Grambling, they were given food, cots or mattresses, blankets, toiletries and towels.

Soon after, a friend's grandmother picked McCoy and a few other students up and housed them until they got back to Portland.

"It was scary, but when you have people around you that you're comfortable with, it makes the transition easier," she said.

Elsewhere, Felix was able to call her dad from Grambling.

"I could tell he was overwhelmed and anxious and worried," Felix said. She was eventually flown back to Portland.

"I was just happy to be headed toward home," Felix said. "It really helps you appreciate life. My heart goes out to every one who helped us."

Concordia's Ongoing Emergency Student Aid Fund can be supported with donations by mailing or delivering a check to the Concordia University Foundation, 2811 N.E. Holman St. Portland, OR 97211; or by contacting Andrea Bruno at 503-280-8505 or via e-mail at abruno@cu-portland.edu.

Blues Concert for Katrina Relief



Linda Hornbuckle



Irma Thomas

continued ▲ from Front

Charmaine Neville, vocalist daughter of New Orleans' famed Neville Brother, Charles, will also perform as one of thousands to escape from Katrina's floodwaters.

The songs of Ray Charles will be honored by Linda Hornbuckle, Curtis Salgado, Duffy Bishop, Andy Stokes, Patrick Lamb and Thara Memory, among many others. Portland's March Fourth Marching Band will offer a colorful, high-energy and eclectic set, along with a mix of Mardi Gras mayhem and stilt-dancers.

A donation of \$10 or more can be made at the gate. All funds raised from admission and food sales will be donated to America's Second Harvest and Oregon Food Bank for hurricane relief.

For more information, visit www.waterfrontbluesfest.com.

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