Obama visit supports Adventist Community Services volunteers in wake of Hurricane Irene

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Obama joined New Jersey Governor Chris Christie on September 4 in the parking lot of an area Lowes Home Improvement store, where he spoke with more than 3,000 affected residents and applauded volunteers for "doing what Americans do in times of crisis: pull together."

"President Obama thanked us for giving back to the community and being there to help others in their time of need," said David L. King, who pastors the First Paterson Adventist Church and directed the community faith-based response in the wake of the storm.

New Jersey was declared a federal disaster area after homes and businesses were flooded following the hurricane. More than 2,000 residents evacuated ahead of the storm, hundreds spent the week in area shelters and area businesses were shuttered, said Ora Jane Bell, director for Adventist Community Services in the region.

With more than 300 volunteers from the church’s Allegheny East Conference, First Paterson's Adventist Community Services served as a distribution hub for nearly $200,000 worth of food, personal care items and cleaning supplies donated by the nonprofit Feed the Children for more than 3,300 affected residents.

The nonprofit Meals for Kids also partnered with First Paterson to provide more than 800 hot meals to the community residents and volunteers.

"I’m so pleased with the outpouring of support and [the] efforts of all our volunteers," King said. "Our community came together to lift spirits by living our faith and providing people with help and hope," he said.

Paterson residents Kathy and Greg were among those who stood in line for food and supplies. The couple moved to an area shelter after knee-high water flooded their house. "Our apartment was condemned this week and ... we need all the help we can get," they said.

Employees and volunteers with Lowes "Heroes" program launched the initial response, offering their parking lot as a relief effort hub and partnering with Feed The Children, which in turn sought the assistance of Adventist Community Services.

"ACS remains very well connected, relevant and committed to local communities nationwide," said Minnie McNeil, who directs the program for the church's Columbia Union Conference.

As a founding member of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster forum, ACS is among nonprofits that share knowledge and resources in disaster response and recovery. The forum is the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency's primary point of contact for voluntary disaster response coordination.