NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

# Volunteers Do Good Deeds, and Even Windows

*Continued From Page D1*

Navy's brig. They joshingly call it "the Hilton" and bear no animosity that, in a city full of empty hotel rooms and locals who might take them in, they sleep in an old jail (men on one side, women on the other).

The volunteers express no qualms about helping people who by some measures are quite well off. "These people have been traumatized," said Paul Montgomery of Hartselle, Ala. "It does not matter what level of affluence they had beforehand. They've suffered."

The Baptists take enormous satisfaction from small pleasures. One team whose members had cleaned apartments with nothing but gorgeous water views was thrilled to finally get an apartment with a view of ground zero, so they could haul pictures back home.

Mr. Montgomery had never visited New York City before. In one short week, he'd not only seen ground zero but he was quickly giving expert directions in and out of the site via bus, subway or car. "That makes me feel good — I'm telling New Yorkers how to get around," said Mr. Montgomery, a retired human resources manager for a chemical company.

Tony Flowers of Vandalia, Ill., another volunteer, understands why some New Yorkers have shied away from the site. "We can hardly handle it either," he said. But a contractor near the Brooklyn Bridge gave him the Big Apple pin he was wearing as a token of gratitude. "We're the ones who get the blessing," Mr. Flowers said.

## Homes are cleaned so residents can return.

Although many of the volunteers are retirees, some sacrifice paychecks and time from families. Liz Clayton and her husband are called tag-teamers, because they take turns the way other couples take separate vacations. That worked fine up until last week. While she volunteered in New York, he was home in Birmingham, Ala., watching the children. But then tornadoes hit two hours from their home. He grabbed his chain saw, and the children were parked with grandparents.

The group has not sought publicity, so it has not had much help in the city's ways. Lila Lynes tried to use her Discover card, the only piece of plastic she carries, to buy some holiday ornaments at Macy's. Sorry, she was told, the store does not accept the card. (Cash saved the day.)

There was also some confusion when a resident of Battery Park City instructed the cleaning crew to toss everything in the refrigerator and freezer. Did that include, they wondered, the $800 in cash they found in the ice compartment? And some volunteers have the suspicion that in a town full of sophisticates, they are the entertainment. "They keep us talking just to hear us talk," Wanda Smith of Nashville said.

Indeed, when one downtown resident was told that a crew from New England was arriving to clean his apartment, he balked, according to Bob Helms, who heads the volunteer effort. "I don't want Yankees," Mr. Helms quoted him as saying. "I want those *Southern* Baptists."

Word has spread fast.

"What wonderful people," said Judi Panevino, whose apartment in 600 Gateway Plaza kept a 10-person Baptist cleaning crew busy for two days.

Mary Healy, a Wall Streeter who is between jobs, could not easily justify the $1,800 that Maxons, a commercial service, wanted to clean her place. She used the Baptists and then demanded to be allowed to take Mrs. Clayton out to lunch as a small thank you. Mrs. Clayton burst into tears later when another woman offered to take her to a show. "These people," she said, "all their stuff is gone and they're worried about us."

Also professed to be worried about the volunteers is Damon Gersh, the owner of Maxons. He said that the out-of-towners might be taking unhealthy risks. He said he believed that Baptists cleaned one apartment on West Street that showed dangerous levels of asbestos. "I'm torn," he said. "It's a great thing for people who don't have insurance or money to have it done by a professional. So I tip my hat to them. But there are some corners being cut and some, let's say, safety precautions being overlooked." The charitable mission's leaders wave off such concerns. Mr. Montgomery said that the group assessed apartments before they sent in a crew. If they entered a hot spot inadvertently, "what's done is done," he said.

There are not many Southern Baptists in the New York region — 17,000 current members, according to the Southern Baptist Convention — but more than 15 million nationwide. The Baptists were brought in at the suggestion of the Red Cross, which saw the need for cleanups and now refers residents to the service. The mission is run with military precision by Mr. Helms, a retired Army colonel.

New York City has contributed cellphones and rags. Church funds have been used to buy basics like mops, stepladders and MetroCards. That leaves volunteers, or their congregations back home, to pick up the cost of gas or airline tickets.

Nonetheless, Mr. Flowers said it did not take him long to find six takers to join him on the ride from Illinois. "But," he allows sheepishly, "we didn't tell them until we started out about the brig."

And who would blame them? Heavy bars guard the entrance to the rooms in the jail where volunteers sleep on rows of cots. A sign across the street by the mess tent warns, "This installation patrolled by military working dogs."

"We're used to third-world countries," Ms. Smith said gamely. "So we're used to these kinds of accommodations."

THE NEW YORK TIMES, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2001

CITY_21MC100_01183363B

NYC-WTC_000415445