



Blankets sent to hurricane survivors
By Pat Kumpan

Remembered - that's what more than 70 Meadowbrook Middle School students want Mississippi kids to feel when they cuddle up to handmade blankets.

Dozens of cozy, fleece "tied" blankets are now on their way to Hattiesburg after Meadowbrook students completed their hands-on project, which was sponsored by their science teachers during after school sessions, according to teacher Ken Carr.

Carr's best friend, Chip Rumis, who happens to be a 1972 Poway High alumni and former Meadowbrook student like Carr, will be hand-delivering the blankets, made from materials donated by the school's families.

Rumis and his wife, Jean, who now live in Ramona, will reach Hattiesburg by motor home in a week. Their mission is to help people rebuild about 100 country churches, the real "heart" of most of the communities that were destroyed by Katrina, according to Rumis.

"Churches have been such a backbone by providing shelter, food and helping families," Rumis said. "But now those families have no place to go, so we have to get the churches up and running." He's hoping that faith-based groups throughout the nation will support the rebuilding effort. Folks can reach Rumis at: adopt-a-church.com.

Rumis stopped by Meadowbrook Monday to pick up the blankets - all different in coloring and patterns - reflecting the personalities of their makers. He was awestruck not with the mound of colorful material, but by the students' enthusiasm and heartwarming gifts that took time and planning to complete, he said.

But he'll be just the messenger when it comes to handing out the blankets. The credit for the project goes to Carr and his fellow teachers for inspiring kids to get involved, he said.

"We wanted our kids to have a way to connect to those kids that survived the hurricane," Carr said. "We wanted something tangible and personal."

Along with the comforters will be letters and a photo of each Meadowbrook student who made a blanket.

Students at the Poway-based school aren't expecting much in return, but a letter from any of the recipients will certainly make their day, according to Carr. Kids will be checking the Rumis Web site for any replies.

Student Matt Copeland selected material that says "California" all over it so someone in Mississippi might ponder a sunny, warm locale to cheer them up, he said.

"But mostly I wanted to give them some reassurance that they're not alone," Copeland said. "We're thinking about them."

For student Celia Walker, making the blankets rekindled her memories of the 2003 Cedar Fire. Two of her friends lost homes in that tragedy, now considered one of the most devastating fires in California history.

"From my experience with the fires, I know that it's good to help out," Walker said. "Helping is the best way to show you care."