

Katrina victims get shirts off malls' backs

When Hurricane Katrina devastated much of the Gulf Coast in August 2005, thousands of Louisiana residents fled their homes, escaping with little more than the shirts on their backs. Texas took in many evacuees; Dallas alone became home for nearly 20,000 of them.

The Macerich Co. recognized the immediate need for clothing among survivors routed to the North Texas communities served by its Valley View Center and Ridgmar Mall. Macerich put out a call to its industry counterparts to raid storage closets for promotional T-shirts and other unused overstock to donate to the hurricane evacuees. Macerich had to organize the effort with great speed — two weeks — but no planned budget.

Implementation

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, with local authorities, set up massive temporary shelters throughout North Texas to accommodate evacuees. Aid was best funneled through charities with prior disaster-relief experience, so Macerich chose to work with Buckner Orphan Care International and The Salvation Army of The Greater Dallas Metroplex to run a relief effort. It also teamed with Lovell Public Relations of Dallas, which provided pro bono services.

Valley View Center in Dallas became the hub of operations, and people could drop off donated items there and at Ridgmar.

Macerich launched an information-campaign Web site, www.tshirtstotexas.com. With no budget, the company had to rely heavily on free, grassroots channels such as online message boards and public service announcements to spread word of the effort. Ridgmar and Valley View posted drop-off information on their mall Web sites too.

Aid poured in nationwide from individuals, retailers and properties representing developers CBL & Associates Properties Inc., Coyote Management L.P., Forest City Enterprises, General



Growth Properties, Jones Lang LaSalle, Madison Marquette, The Mills Corp., Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust and Richard E. Jacobs Group.

The Salvation Army's Hurricane Katrina distribution center was the staging ground for the initial "T-shirts to Texas" relief effort on Sept. 15, 2005. Employees from Valley View, Ridgmar and Grapevine Mills personally distributed new shirts and other basic necessities to hurricane evacuees.

Results

Individuals, retailers, developers and 150 shopping centers nationwide supported the effort.

Nearly 40,000 T-shirts and 18,000 additional items — hats, tote bags, water bottles, stuffed animals and more — were shipped to Dallas and distributed statewide to hurricane evacuees. The gear came from 63 centers in 25 states and 12 vendors nationwide.

Dozens of Valley View employees and their families logged nearly 250 service hours well into October, cataloging and sorting items for distribution. Two dozen NBC and Telemundo media executives spent a day volunteering at Valley View.

"T-shirts to Texas" generated 26,238,185 impressions in North Texas and received \$25,000 worth of strategic coordination, PR services and campaign oversight for free. The campaign received more than \$4,000 worth of on-air radio time through KLTY-FM.

The campaign strengthened relationships with Buckner and The Salvation Army, prompting the latter to choose Valley View as the kick-off mall for its holiday "Angel Tree" program. ■

T-shirts to Texas

The Macerich Co.
Santa Monica, Calif.

Expenses: \$2,100 (Macerich's net cost)

Professional Recognition: Andrea Taylor, marketing manager, Valley View Center, Jill Ferguson, assistant marketing manager, Valley View Center, Robert Kirk, CMD, vice president, marketing, Susan Valentine, SCMD, senior vice president, consumer marketing
Betty A. Lovell, president, Lovell Public Relations