

Jewish group gives \$100,000 to SMHA

BY HENRI LEJEUNE
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A nationwide Jewish organization is donating \$100,000 to the Southern Mutual Help Association.

The money will be used to help the SMHA's ongoing efforts to rebuild rural communities in areas affected by the most recent hurricanes. The Union for Reform Judaism provided the funds.

The donation was presented Friday at the Congregation Gates of Prayer Jewish synagogue at 109 Weeks St. A supper preceded a 7:30 p.m. service at the synagogue and the presentation of the donation followed.

Sherry Levy-Reiner, religious action center development director for URJ, helped secure the funds. Levy-Reiner and her husband, Fred, who live in Washington, D.C., heard about the organization through the local congregation and wanted to help.

URJ received \$3.5 million from members across the country to assist those hurt by the storms, and Levy-Reiner passed along the information about the SMHA to their fund dispersal committee. She said the panel was so impressed with the New Iberia-based organization, they allocated the money to them.

"The ones that did the due diligence were very impressed," Levy-Reiner said.

Lorna Bourg, SMHA president and executive director, said the money will be used to fund the purchase of materials and equipment for the renovation of homes and businesses damaged during the most recent storms.

"I'm delighted the local temple and Union of Reform Judaism chose to help," Bourg said.

She said the amount donated was larger than her expectations and added that it will allow them to help many displaced by the storm.

The Jewish community both locally and nationally has a 15-year history of assisting the group. Bourg said the organization is committed to helping rural communities grow strong. They work with local community leaders and churches to discern where there is a spirit of



Levy-Reiner, seated left, Joel Wallins, standing left, Student Rabbi David Reiner and Rabbi Fred N. Reiner before the Sabbath service at Congregation Gates of Prayer on Friday night.

community involvement and also where needs are greatest. They then work to make that community stronger through rebuilding, donations and other efforts, Bourg said.

The company does not take applications to administer the services it provides. The organization discerns on its own through contacts in the community and even visits the communities on its own to determine who receives the help. They work with local community leaders and others to find people who are willing to help themselves and the community. SMHA looks for those who want to help themselves and their community grow, Bourg said.

SMHA has engaged volunteers from across the country in its efforts to help an 11-parish area affected by the storms. An many as 200,000 homes have been damaged or lost because of flood waters, Bourg said. SMHA has restored 55 homes and businesses since

the hurricanes hit, and are working on 32. They hope to assist in the rebuilding of Delcambre and Erath.

Bourg said the destruction in New Orleans has been a great tragedy, but those of south central and western Louisiana have suffered as well. They hope to focus efforts there. They hope their movement to rebuild local communities grows as well.

Levy-Reiner and Fred Reiner, who is a rabbi at a synagogue in Washington, D.C., also assisted the community by donating school book bags filled with supplies to children affected in the storms. They also were in town to attend the first service of their son David who is serving as a rabbi at the New Iberia synagogue.

For more information about the SMHA visit their Web site at www.southernmutual-help.org.

For more information on URJ visit their Web site at urj.org.

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