

MICKEY TO THE RESCUE

Red Cross brings magic of Disney to ACC students

With the help of a familiar and friendly face, the American Red Cross delivered smiles and joy to Anne Carlsen Center students this spring during the Center's flood-related evacuation.

Plush Mickey Mouse toys from the Walt Disney Company were placed into children's hands by the local chapter of the Red Cross. It was a welcome surprise for the students who had been busy adjusting to new surroundings and routines since flood conditions displaced them on March 23.

Beth Dewald, the Executive Director of the Buffalo Valley Chapter of the Red Cross, delivered the plush toys to the students.

"Seeing the lighting up of the children's faces – the giggles and the excitement – it was amazing," said Dewald. "Not only the kids, but also the staff. It was an honor to do it."

Disney donated 150,000 plush toys to the American Red Cross in 2009, the fourth year Mickeys have been given to children forced from their homes by disaster in communities nationwide. As ACC students came face-to-face with one of the most recognizable icons ever, the joy generated by the plush toy was immediately visible.

"Mickey is an iconic symbol for Disney and is what Disney is all about," explains Karen Kawanami, the director of Disney World Wide Outreach. "We try to brighten the lives of children."

The first plush Mickeys were given to young victims of California wildfires. For a number of years, the Red Cross gave out a variety of toys to relief sites, but the one that consistently got the biggest response was Mickey. Because

of the positive feedback, Disney began extending a helping hand—in the form of a loveable and widely-recognizable character—to the rest of the country.

The eight-inch-tall plush toys have required a bit of responsibility on the part of the Center students—a responsibility each was more than willing to take on. Before giving each student his or her own plush toy, Dewald explained that she was entrusting Mickey into that student's care. She wanted each child and young adult to know that Mickey needed to be hugged and kept happy during the flood-related transitions.

ACC Emergency Coordinator Ryan Keffeler traveled with Dewald to the four locations where students were living temporarily at that time: Jamestown Hospital, Zebedee Center at St. John's Academy, Hi-Acres Manor Nursing Center and Heritage Centre-Ave Maria Village.

"It was really exciting to see the expressions of the children and young adults when they got the plush toys," said Keffeler. "It was heart-warming and unforgettable."

Beth Dewald, the Executive Director of the Buffalo Valley Chapter of the Red Cross, gives Carol a thumbs up after delivering her plush Mickey toy.

Adam smiles as he receives his plush Mickey toy from the American Red Cross.

