Frank Wolf
The dean of the School of Continuing Education (SCE), through which most of the students entered Columbia, talks about what the process entailed.

Joe Ienuso
The vice president for Academic and Residential Facilities describes the procedures established to compile and communicate rapidly changing information.

Columbians Provide Emergency Health Services to Katrina Victims

In the immediate wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Mailman School of Public Health’s National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCPD) joined forces with the Children’s Health Fund (CHF) to launch “Operation Assist,” with the mission of providing critical health services for victims.

Led by Irwin Redlener of the Mailman School and music legend Paul Simon, the operation consisted of sending two custom-designed, fully equipped, state-of-the-art mobile medical units (MMUs) to the areas hardest hit by the storm and its aftermath.

Each MMU is approximately 35 feet long and contains examination rooms and a nurse’s station, as well as waiting and registration areas. The units are fully equipped with diagnostic equipment, computers, satellite and standard communications, and power generators. They can be deployed in any location that has accessible roads.

Simone and Redlener traveled to the Gulf region to survey the devastation and to meet the MMUs. “Just as soon as we opened the doors, there were patients all over the place,” Redlener told CNN News.

Simone and Redlener have collaborated many times before, responding to 9/11 in NYC and various international disasters. They organized a similar program following Hurricane Andrew in 1992.

Meanwhile, the School of Nursing’s Center for Health Policy (CHP) has assisted national efforts to coordinate nursing volunteers in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Four CHP nursing volunteers immediately traveled south to provide assistance in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

Benefit Concert for Katrina Survivors

On Tuesday, Sept. 13, in St. Paul’s Chapel, 55 student musicians and artists conducted a musical extravaganza to honor Hurricane Katrina survivors and provide relief funds. Beginning with pieces by Schubert, Chopin, Mendelssohn and Rachmaninoff, the program went on to pay tribute to New Orleans as the home of a uniquely American musical tradition, with performances of jazz, gospel, hip-hop and the spoken word, culminating in jazz pianist Chris Mueller’s moving rendition of Duke Ellington’s “Come Sunday.”

Other highlights included a jazz improvisation by George Lewis, a professor of music who is also a renowned trombonist and composer. Beginning with pieces by Schubert, Chopin, Mendelssohn and Rachmaninoff, the program went on to pay tribute to New Orleans as the home of a uniquely American musical tradition, with performances of jazz, gospel, hip-hop and the spoken word, culminating in jazz pianist Chris Mueller’s moving rendition of Duke Ellington’s “Come Sunday.”

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There may be some attrition, and there is a concern that those admitted will need to be managed accordingly.

At our next meeting the group will turn its attention to fund-raising initiatives for Columbia students whose families live in the affected area. Also, CU students have been organizing relief events. We will compile a list of these and see if there is any need for coordination.

What have you learned from the experience? Is there anything you do differently if this kind of crisis were to happen again?

Joe Ienuso: It was a great experience in many ways as it represented Columbia at its best: its willingness to extend a hand in a time of great need and in such a timely and organized fashion.

As always, lessons have been learned, and they will be applied moving forward. Among these lessons is the value of coordinated efforts and good information. For instance, it was our original understanding that only undergraduates were being admitted—but then that quickly expanded to Law and Social Work, and so on. Our meetings helped to clarify which schools were involved and how the appropriate administrative offices could validate assistance.