

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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KATRINA EVACUEE TRANSFORMS TRAUMA INTO SERVICE

Goodwill Industries International Names Denice Cooper 2008 Volunteer of the Year

Rockville, MD — After a perilous escape from New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, Denice Cooper relocated to Nacogdoches, TX, where she dedicated herself to helping her fellow evacuees as an AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteer. She decided to continue her AmeriCorps service by volunteering at Goodwill Industries of Central East Texas (Lufkin), where she spent almost 900 hours in 2007 mentoring children with mental and emotional disabilities. Cooper is being honored as the 2008 Goodwill Industries International® Volunteer of the Year.

Today, Cooper provides both individual and group mentoring as well as structured activities for children served by Goodwill. She also mentors adults with disabilities who are entering the workforce and need ongoing support.

“Denice was selected to mentor our workforce clients because of her compassion and her inspiring example of how to transform hardship into success,” says Nancy Bledsoe, President and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Central East Texas. “She has turned the trauma of her Katrina experience into personal motivation and speaks of her journey as a gift.”

Cooper, now 62, also initiated a “Getting Fit for Life” walking group that she facilitates weekly, sometimes bringing in speakers who present during the walk.

“Volunteers are the hidden gems within Goodwill Industries as evidenced by Denice’s enormous contributions to the Lufkin Goodwill and her community,” says Jim Gibbons, President and CEO of Goodwill Industries International. “She leads and teaches by example, transforming the lives of so many in the process.”

The Volunteer of the Year Award is given in recognition of an outstanding volunteer who works in support of a member Goodwill organization. The program also is designed to focus attention on the expanding role of the volunteer in Goodwill Industries and the organization’s commitment to serving people with disabilities and other barriers to employment.

Contact

Christine Nyirjesy Bragale, ABC
Director, Media Relations
Goodwill Industries International
Tel. (240) 333-5264
E-mail christine.bragale@goodwill.org