

Students use luck and a truck to help after Hurricane Ida

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Third-year medical students Kirstin Hughes (left) and Darren Cheng (right) collected donated supplies and delivered them to Tulane residents working Code Grey hospital shifts.

With classes canceled by Hurricane Ida, third year medical students Darren Cheng and Kirsten Hughes could have evacuated as the storm left New Orleans without power, gas shortages, limited food supplies and increasing heat. Instead, Cheng and Hughes decided to shelter in place and stay for the aftermath. Why? Because the own one of the most valuable tools to help with the beginning of the recovery process – a truck to deliver supplies where they are most needed.

“We showed up to Hutchinson at just the right time to help, so it was a combination of luck, having the resources to assist and having a lot of free time,” said Cheng. “Plus, we didn’t want to be sitting at home without air conditioning when it was 90 degrees.”

Their truck made too many trips to count across the metro area in the days after Hurricane Ida, even as streetlights weren’t working and debris blocked many roads. One of those outings was to a church in northern Louisiana that donated supplies for Tulane School of Medicine residents working 72-hour shifts. Cheng and Hughes drove to Slidell to pick up those supplies and deliver them to residents at area hospitals. The two students stocked resident food pantries, coordinated meal deliveries, brought COVID-19 antigen testing kits to all the programs and even arranged for all the residency programs to get a hot meal from Fat Boy’s Pizza.

Hughes says the last two weeks have given her a bold, new perspective on the people who keep hospitals, a medical school and a university going during a major emergency.

“You don’t realize what it takes just to run to the grocery store if you’re on a team in the hospital,” said Hughes. “It was nice to be part of the auxiliary people that kept things running.”

As the recovery from Hurricane Ida continues, Cheng and Hughes plan to keep using their truck for more efforts both at the School of Medicine and in communities hit worst by the storm.

“These students are an example of what it means to live up to Tulane’s motto, not for one’s self but one’s own,” said Dr. Lee Hamm, Sr. Vice President and Dean of Tulane University School of Medicine. “Being part of a team and supporting each other is a big part of what we hope to teach here, and I couldn’t be prouder of Darren and Kirsten for their selfless efforts.”



Cheng, seen here with an employee of Fat Boys Pizza, and Hughes (not pictured) delivered hot food to working residents at local hospitals.