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## Kind words, sweet treats for evacuees

Posted on: Saturday, September 20, 2008, 5:51 AM

By Hayley Kappes  
Killeen Daily Herald

After an influx of Hurricane Ike evacuees escaped to Killeen for solace from the storm, a group of students decided they needed to help.

They didn't donate food, clothing or supplies. What they offered to evacuees was something simple and free: their words.

Students of **Richard Milburn Academy's** Student Advisory Leadership Team wrote 70 encouraging messages for people staying at the Killeen Community Center, expressing their sympathy for what the evacuees were forced to endure.

Word caught on.

Students from Clifton Park Elementary, Nolan Junior High and Ellison High School's ROTC program began writing evacuees short, uplifting messages.

"After it started here, we went and talked to other people who wanted to do it," said Kakkie Shea, whose daughter, Amberkae, is a senior at **Richard Milburn**. "There are about 400 messages that the students sent to evacuees."

Shea and her daughter have volunteered at the community center every day since evacuees arrived. A local movie theater let 70 evacuees see a free movie. The center hosted an ice cream party for evacuees Friday evening, because "they needed to have entertainment," Shea said.

"We saw them come in and we could tell they were having a hard time," Amberkae said. "They're pulled away from their homes and sometimes a small message or an encouraging word goes a long way."

Heather Hurst, 22, of Lake Jackson has stayed at the community center since Sept. 11.

"It makes me feel like I'm at home when people of Killeen treat us with such hospitality," Hurst said. "Everyone has been so sweet. The messages the little kids sent us show that parents are raising their kids right."

**Richard Milburn** is a public charter high school designed for students who struggled to learn in the public school system.

Rose Thompson, school director at the **academy**, said the school's mission encourages students to graduate, be productive citizens and pursue a college degree.

"Our system is based on respect," Thompson said. "Students and teachers equally show respect for each other."

"Students want to learn. They want to do their best, and we embrace that."

**Richard Milburn** students voted a message written by senior James Fletcher as one of the two best. He said he overcame personal crises, but will graduate in December and intends to study pharmaceutical law.

"I was going through child protective services, and my mother wasn't doing much to help me, but now I've turned everything around," Fletcher said. "We're told we can make a difference by writing messages to people whose lives have been affected. I just wanted to let them know that I am willing to help and there's thousands here in Killeen who are willing to help."

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**Herald/SARAH MOORE KUSCHELL**  
Hurricane Ike evacuee Kodi Tipp, 4, from Clute, enjoys a bowl of ice cream donated by the Richard Milburn Academy students at the Killeen Community Center on Friday night. Apart from the ice cream Tipp's favorite part of the giveaway was the star-shaped toppings.



**Herald/SARAH MOORE KUSCHELL**  
A Richard Milburn Academy High School student gives an ice cream cone to a Hurricane Ike evacuee at the Killeen Community Center on Friday.

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Contact Hayley Kappes at [hayleyk@kdhnews.com](mailto:hayleyk@kdhnews.com) or (254) 501-7559.

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