

# St. Patrick parishioner raises \$40K for flood relief

KATIE PETERSON

The St. Patrick Church in McEwen chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society's flood relief fund is now \$40,000 richer thanks to the hard work of a lifelong Humphreys County resident.

Dylan Fuller, St. Patrick Church parishioner and St. Patrick School alumnus, knew he wanted to help victims of the recent flash floods, but he also knew he couldn't make a difference by himself.

"I was not directly affected by the floods but seeing people I call friends lose so much really hit home for me," Fuller said. "I have recently started a job with Meriwether Lewis Electric Cooperative, and when the floods came and the power went out, it was my job, along with all of our crews to restore power to all that we could.

"That long week of working, I could see the devastation in the families who lost so much. It really hit me hard," he said. "Some lost loved ones, homes, belongings and more. But I knew that by myself, I couldn't make a difference."

But he did find a way to work together. Bringing in his love of fishing, Fuller, with the help of his wife Skylar Fuller and others, organized a bass fishing tournament for Saturday, Oct. 30, to raise funds.

"Organizing the tournament required first getting sponsors interested. I



Dylan Fuller, far right, along with his wife, Skylar Fuller, far left, pose for a photo with St. Patrick Church in McEwen St. Vincent de Paul Society chapter members Eddie Bozman and Barbara Hooper after presenting them with a \$40,000 check for the flood relief fund on Tuesday, Nov. 2.

made a ranking system for sponsors and donors so that the more they could give, the more advertising they would get in return," Fuller explained. "Once I had a handful of sponsors to cover the payout, I set the date, location and times.

"I got in touch with everyone I know in the fishing world, whether it be businesses or fishermen, to explain the tournament and to spread the word," he continued. "We asked for monetary donations as well as prizes to do a raffle. I also found someone who cooks for charity events to make barbecue plates to sell as well as Boston butts.

"Finally, I got in touch with a fishing friend of mine who exceeds tournaments for a living to bring his trailer and stage to do all the crowd entertaining and fish weighing. Bringing this all together, we planned out the day's schedule and went for it."

The results were more than he ever imagined as 87 teams launched from the New Johnsonville boat ramp on Kentucky Lake the morning of the tournament. Anglers had nearly eight hours to catch the five biggest bass they could before they were weighed in at Jera Park. There, anglers and attendees also enjoyed the raffle, food and entertainment, and, in the end, a check for \$40,011.79 was made out to the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

"Once I met the payout value with sponsor money, I knew that team entry fees would go straight to the cause. As this time, I thought I could maybe pull together 40 or 50 boats and raise between \$8,000 to \$10,000," Fuller said. "But the sponsors and donors kept coming as I asked more and more local businesses and businesses in the fishing world.

"The word spread, my Facebook posts got shared, and teams began to

sign up," he said. "We exceeded our goal in a big way."

Fuller said he had no doubt the funds would be put to good use.

"The team at St. Vincent de Paul are really great about using the money wisely. I know that they will help families rebuild homes, find new homes and get them moved in, as well as get belongings back to them that they so desperately need," he said. "There are several families they are already working with, and I hope this will just add to the pot to get those families feeling a little more back to normal."

Barbara Hooper, flood relief coordinator and chapter vice president for the St. Vincent de Paul Society, said she can hardly put into words what Fuller's work means to the society and for flood victims.

"There are so many people that are in need right now," Hooper said. "It is such a blessing ... to see a young man that is willing to work so hard for the people in Humphreys County and to take this on."

Laura Ross, parishioner of St. Patrick Church and aunt to Fuller, said her nephew has always enjoyed fishing and even took St. Andrew, the fisherman, as his Confirmation name.

"Dylan took his love of fishing and with a faithful heart set out to help those who have suffered so terribly these last few months," Ross said. "He truly answered God's call to help in a profound way.

"It's humbling to think how many people will be immediately helped by the funds he raised," she added. "All from a young man who just loves to fish."

Fuller said he just wanted to live by Jesus' teaching of the Golden Rule in the Gospel of Matthew: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

"With this rule in my heart, I always feel that if I am blessed enough to have the ability to help someone else out, then it is my job to do so," Fuller said. "Also, if I'm in need to be helped, I hope others will feel blessed enough with their own lives to be able to help me in return.

"I really just want this to be used as a way for people to see the good through all the bad. Jesus told Peter where to throw his nets to catch a boat load of fish, even though Peter had tried and tried and caught nothing," he continued. "Peter listened and caught a boat load of fish. What I feel He wanted us to see is that if you listen to His word then good things will come. I really feel that He gave me the gift of being a fisherman, and, as a fisherman, I knew that I could do this for my community."✠

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