

Active retirement

Rocky Mount couple travels to help disaster victims

BY BETH VELLIQUETTE

Rocky Mount

In 1990, when Bart Shively retired, he and his wife Mary wanted to do what many retired people do — see the country, meet new people and do a little volunteer work.

They've seen the country and met lots of people. And they've done a lot of volunteer work.

They accomplished all three goals by becoming American Red Cross volunteers who help victims of major disasters.

Shively, 66, who retired from the Army and for 10 years was headmaster at Enfield Academy north of Rocky Mount, began looking for a place to volunteer once he had retired for good. His wife suggested the Red Cross.

"We beg for retired people," says Rosalie Lemieux, director of the Rocky Mount chapter. "They're our best resource. They're knowledgeable. They don't have families. They're the backbone of the disaster program."

The Shivelys signed up and immediately began training to become disaster volunteers. After taking courses such as Introduction to Disasters and Family Services, the couple were ready to go.

Within a month or two, they left on their first assignment — a major flood in Louisiana. While Bart Shively worked as a case worker interviewing people who needed immediate help and visiting their houses, Mary Shively maintained the case files and

financial reports at the on-site office.

The Red Cross, which usually arrives at a disaster scene before federal officials, provides immediate emergency financial assistance by writing purchase orders that the clients can take to local merchants and purchase what they need. The Red Cross then pays the merchant.

The Red Cross pays for clothing, beds, tables, dressers, major appliances, medicine, food, as well as such things as dentures, hearing aids and glasses.

"On the spot, you give them everything they need," Bart Shively says.

The disaster victims are sometimes confused, depressed and scared. In Louisiana, the floods dumped mud and muck into the home of a recently widowed mother of two.

"She was not coping at all with her circumstances," says Bart Shively.

"She just would not leave her house," he says. "She was just trying to cling to what used to be her life."

Shively spent several hours talking and listening to her, and finally was able to get her to accept some help.

"She wrote a letter saying she appreciated what the Red Cross did for her, but she really appreciated having someone to talk to," Mary Shively says.

Other people are reluctant to accept help from the Red Cross.

"They feel like it's a welfare thing, but it's not," says Bart

Shively. "It's a gift from the American people that they donated for this purpose. I always try to use the term, a neighbor helping a neighbor."

The Shivelys spent five weeks in Louisiana. The days began early and ended late. Because disasters leave many victims homeless, the Red Cross volunteers do not use any available local housing.

In Louisiana, the Shivelys stayed in a motel 75 miles away and commuted back and forth every day, often working 10 hours at the Red Cross service centers.

"Many of the disaster people are retired," Mary Shively says. "They get tired, but they just keep going."

They may admit they're exhausted at the end of a long day, but the volunteers don't complain about their work or long hours, Bart Shively says.

"The only time I've ever heard a disaster worker complain is when they think somebody out there isn't getting what they need."

Since their first assignment, the Shivelys have volunteered in the wake of hurricanes Andrew and Emily; in Hillsborough after a tornado; in the Midwest during the floods and at a number of fires.

Without volunteers like the Shivelys, the Red Cross could not operate, says Lemieux of the Rocky Mount chapter. "There's no way that the staff could handle these disasters. The volunteers have more training, more expertise and more time. We just depend on them so much."

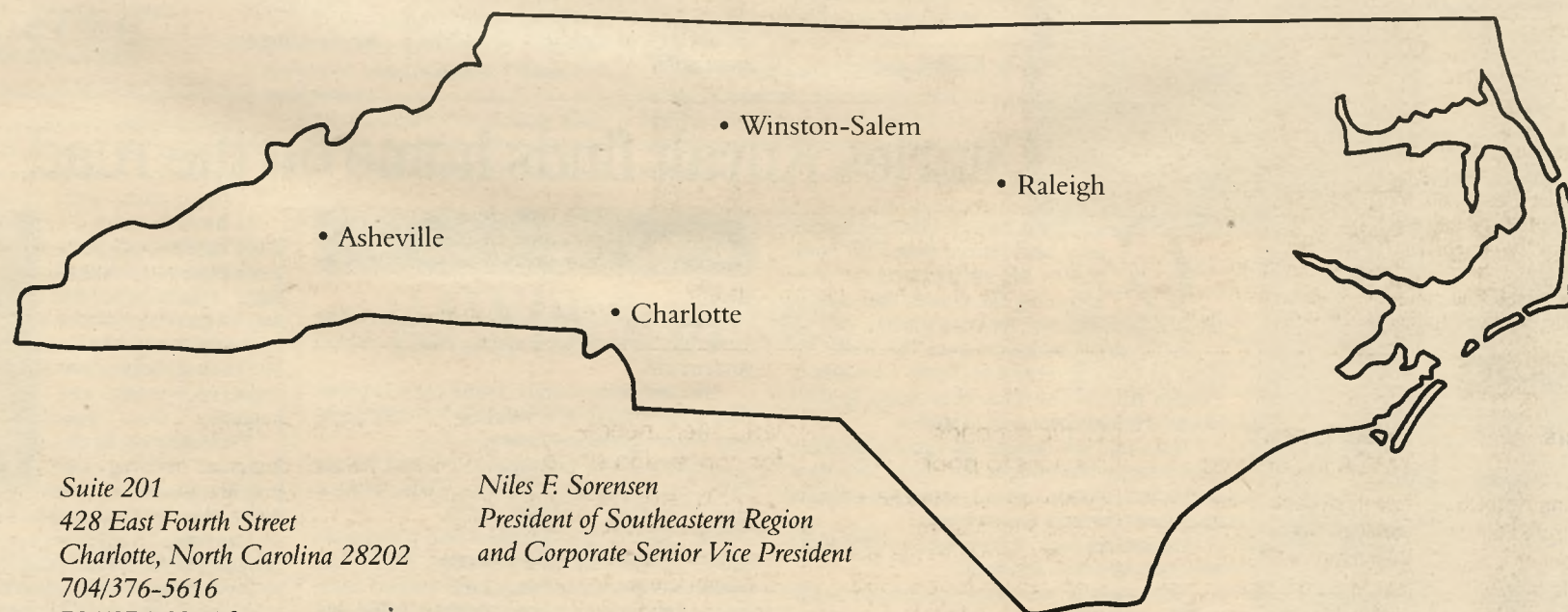


Mary and Bart Shively are spending their retirement helping others as volunteers at the American Red Cross. The couple, trained as volunteer disaster relief specialists, traveled to Louisiana last year to assist flood victims.

Photo by Beth Velliquette

Ketchum, Inc.

is proud to have served as fund-raising counsel on 320 capital campaigns that have raised \$664,294,366 for non-profit organizations in North Carolina during the past 30 years.



Suite 201
428 East Fourth Street
Charlotte, North Carolina 28202
704/376-5616
704/376-8255 fax

Niles F. Sorensen
President of Southeastern Region
and Corporate Senior Vice President

Member, American Association
of Fund-Raising Counsel