

Pilot takes hurricane relief to great heights

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In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Larry Scheinpflug of Dunwoody is taking volunteer work to a whole other level.

Try about 9,000 feet. Skimming the clouds at 160 mph in his four-seat, single-engine 200 horsepower Mooney prop plane, Scheinpflug flew three missions last week to the storm battered Gulf Coast as a pilot for Angel Flight of Georgia, which operates out of DeKalb-Peachtree Airport (PDK) in Chamblee.

Loading dozens of boots, medical supplies, blankets and packages of baby formula into his small plane, Scheinpflug, 47, described the Mississippi cities he visited—Hattiesburg, Bay St. Louis and Gulfport—as “devastated.”

By day a group environmental manager for Georgia-Pacific, Scheinpflug has about 1,000 hours flight time, a lot for a private



Dunwoody pilot Larry Scheinpflug flew relief supplies to three Gulf cities last week. Photo by Andy Phelan.

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civilian pilot. Altogether he's carried more than 900 pounds of supplies to the region devastated by the storm. The cost of fuel to get down and back is more than \$200.

He's paying the tab. “This is my way to give back,” he said, helping organize piles of goods in hangar F at PDK. “Georgia-Pacific gave me Wednesday through Friday off to do this,” said Scheinpflug, who is also team leader of G-P's “Rebuilding Together” program that refurbishes homes for the elderly and disabled.

“A lot of people need our help down there. I have the unique ability to really help and deliver much-needed supplies that the Red Cross can't.”

Known more for transporting sick children to and from distant hospitals for medical care, Angel Flight of Georgia has flown more than 1,200 missions this year. By the end of the day Sept. 9, Angel Flight had flown more than 200 missions for victims of Katrina. Patients in 25 states and four countries have received help from the nonprofit, which formed back in 1983.

Its executive director, **Jeanine Chambers Biron**,

gathers pilots and supply volunteers around her in the hangar to organize the day's flights. Her voice is hoarse from talking for two weeks straight coordinating flights. She has so many people calling her for help, a caller can't leave a message on her cell phone.

Her typical work days since the hurricane hit are about 14 to 16 hours.

“We desperately need children's activity books and toys, things kids need for comfort,” she said, then turning to answer a call. “I'll be here 'til midnight,” she tells the caller, using stacked boxes of hand sanitizer as a makeshift desk. “We're also out of medical supplies.”

Operating on a \$150,000 donation, Biron has shoppers hit stores, then cuts them a check. Last week, Angel Flight spent \$110,000 for supplies.

“I've noticed as the weeks progress, the needs are changing,” Biron said. “Victims need more medical supplies, like tetanus, hepatitis A and hepatitis B shots. We even sent a defibrillator down there.”

Cruising through clouds on his way to 8,000 feet, it's easy to see why Scheinpflug loves what he does and how he chooses to volunteer. After-

noon thermals, rising bodies of warm air, make the climb a little bumpy out of Atlanta for the 3,000-pound plane. Once he gets above the clouds, it's smooth sailing to Gulfport.

“It's hard to describe the beauty up here,” he says scanning the horizon. “It's peaceful. It's freedom.”

But on the ground, Scheinpflug got a different view—an up close look at the sheer scale of the damage left by Katrina. Meeting with DeKalb County Fire Battalion Chief **Bill Smith**, who is leading a team of 24 DeKalb firefighters working relief missions in Gulfport, he got a tour of the area after delivering his supplies.

The swath of coastal devastation is so complete a visitor gets a sense this is how it looked after the Asian tsunami in late 2004.

Realizing the firefighters were picking through the lumber, shattered glass and fields of debris for victims of the hurricane, Scheinpflug couldn't help gain a new perspective on the magnitude of relief effort.

“They're doing incredibly dangerous work down here,” he said. “It's amazing.”

For more information, go online at www.angelflight-ga.org.