



## Red Cross volunteers to help folks in Tennessee

Mike O'Brien is driving the American Red Cross Rock River Chapter Emergency Response Vehicle from Rockford to Tennessee to help flood victims.

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ROCKFORD — Two volunteers with the American Red Cross Rock River Chapter are headed to storm-tossed Nashville, Tenn., this morning.

They're leaving at 7:45 a.m. from the Rockford site, 727 N. Church St., in the chapter's Emergency Response Vehicle and plan to distribute food, water and cleanup kits to residents. Those kits usually have mops, buckets and disinfectants.

Mike O'Brien received the call Monday asking for volunteers, and he started packing his bags.

"It's always a real short notice," the 55-year-old Rockton resident. "My wife said, If this is something you want to do, go ahead, we'll see you in two weeks."

This isn't O'Brien's first trip with the Red Cross. He first called the Red Cross to see how he could help after Hurricane Katrina hit. He's traveled as a volunteer to Louisiana for disaster relief after hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

"It's something that I've always wanted to do," he said. "I want to help people. It's something I've always enjoyed."

O'Brien is on call once a month for local disasters, too, such as fires or floods.

Red Cross volunteers are trained in disaster-relief operations. The service responds to hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and fires to assist victims and offer support.

When they're deployed, they usually plan to be gone for about three weeks, said Cedric Johnson, public relations and communications manager for the Red Cross chapter.

O'Brien plans to be gone for two weeks, taking time off from his job at Forest City Gear in Roscoe.

"I start thinking about all the personal stuff I'm going to need," he said. "It's not like I'm going on vacation."

After the initial deployment to Nashville, the pair will be sent wherever they're most needed in Tennessee to offer support.

"I'm pretty ready to go right now," he said Tuesday. "My mind-set is already there."

Reach staff writer Cathy Bayer at [cbayer@rrstar.com](mailto:cbayer@rrstar.com) or 815-987-1395. Copyright 2010 Rockford Register Star. Some rights reserved