

SOUTH HOLLAND

Living

Sept | Oct 2025

South Holland's Heart in Action



8th Annual
Village of South Holland



Think Pink and Blue... Men Get It Too!

Saturday, October 11 | 9:00am
Veterans Memorial Park
500 E 160th Place

This walk and car caravan is dedicated to honoring the resilience of breast cancer survivors. Let's unite to raise awareness within the South Holland community!



Learn more at southholland.org.

FROM YOUR MAYOR



*Mayor De Graff at the
Community Center 25th Anniversary*

Dear South Holland Residents and Friends,

As I look out my window on this sunny September day, I'm reminded of how we, as the South Holland community, enjoyed a warm, productive, and fun-filled 2025 summer. Within this autumn edition of our *South Holland Living* magazine, you'll see many smiling faces that reinforce the thought that South Holland is truly "A Village Like No Other."

As we enter this Fall season, we look forward to cooler air and stunning autumn colors changing before our eyes. What will not change are the well-orchestrated events that allow us to "come together" under a variety of venues to celebrate our Faith and Family traditions.

You'll also see in this issue how dedicated we are as South Hollanders to serve and support others in need. From our annual Breast Cancer Walk & Drive, to the I.A.M. mentoring initiative for young girls, to the efforts of our Village administrative team serving as the hands and feet of Jesus in weather-ravaged communities in North Carolina and Texas, we join together to clearly showcase who we are as a community.

I'm deeply grateful to God for instilling in us the values that promote faith and family. These demonstrations of servant hearts make a difference in the lives of others who need hope and encouragement. There is no doubt these selfless efforts will provide a bright future for many and for generations to come.

I know you'll enjoy this special issue of *South Holland Living*. It's a testament to who we are as the community of South Holland, Illinois.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Don A. De Graff
Mayor

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EDITORIAL STAFF

Director of Communications

Julia Huisman

Contributing Writers

Josh Bootsma
Carrie Steinweg
Ronda Williams
Kylie Williams

Photographers

Lawrence Bickerstaff
Josh Bootsma
Manuel Corazzari
Angela Jackson
Michael McGee

Designer

Jenni Hoekstra

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Join us for a fun and entertaining 5K run/walk through the streets of South Holland!

The Village of
South
Holland
Faith, Family,
& Future

2025 SOUTH HOLLAND

FUN RUN



5K

~ Celebrating 20 years of a 5K in South Holland! ~

Saturday, September 20

Opening Ceremony: 7:00am

Veterans Memorial Park • 500 E 160th Place

- ▶ **Costumes/Accessories Encouraged**
- ▶ **Finisher's Medals**
- ▶ **Cash Prizes**
- ▶ **"Fun" Stations Along the Course!**



Register Today!

**Sign up at
southholland.org**

A portion of every registration fee benefits the Intelligent and Ambitious Minds organization.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND SOUTH HOLLAND



FAMILY ATHLETIC CENTER GROUNDBREAKING

Village officials and staff recently celebrated the groundbreaking of South Holland's largest upcoming project—the Family Athletic Center (FAC). Designed to provide year-round opportunities for youth athletics, the FAC will serve as a hub for programs, tournaments, and events. In partnership with South Holland Recreational Services, the facility will primarily support elementary and middle school youth while also offering select adult and senior programs.

Construction updates will be shared on the Village of South Holland Facebook page.

HOW TO SUBMIT A POLICE TIP



The South Holland Police Department offers two convenient ways to share information that can help protect our community:

Phone Tip Line: Call 833.805.0187 to submit information directly.

Online Tip: Share tips anonymously through our secure online system, southholland.org/tips.

Anonymous tips allow you to report crimes or suspicious activity without revealing your identity. Your information, big or small, can make a difference in keeping South Holland safe.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES



The Village of South Holland is hiring. Job opportunities are available in multiple departments, including Police, Community Development, Public Works, and Recreational Services. Residents and qualified applicants are encouraged to explore these openings and contribute to the community. Current postings may be viewed at southholland.org.

WATER PAYMENT OPTIONS



The Village offers multiple ways to pay your water bill. Our electronic payment system is a user-friendly way to pay water bills online via credit card. You can schedule recurring payments, receive your bill via email, and pay by text. You can also pay using one of the methods below:

- Pay by Direct Debit (where bill is automatically paid from your checking account).
- Pay in-person at the Customer Service Center, 16220 Wausau Ave
- Pay over the phone at 855.786.5265.

For more information and to use the online water payment tools, visit southholland.org.

OUT AND ABOUT

FACES FROM EVENTS AROUND THE VILLAGE

FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION

South Holland celebrated the Fourth of July Celebration with a full day at Veterans Memorial Park. At the Family Fun Festival during the day, attendees enjoyed games, inflatables, live music, and more. At the fireworks show that evening, families gathered around the park for fellowship, music and fireworks that lit up the night sky.



OUT AND ABOUT

FACES FROM EVENTS AROUND THE VILLAGE

CONCERTS IN THE PARK

This summer, the Village expanded its concert series at Veterans Park, hosting three performances instead of just one as in prior years. The lineup featured a variety of genres, including gospel, popular cover tunes, and house music. Following a Ravinia-style format, guests were invited to bring their own food and drinks, relax on the lawn, and enjoy the music—or join in the dancing whenever the energy struck.

GOSPEL



COVER



HOUSE



OUT AND ABOUT

FACES FROM EVENTS AROUND THE VILLAGE

COMMUNITY CENTER 25TH ANNIVERSARY

This summer, the South Holland Community Center marked its 25th anniversary with a festive celebration. A commemorative balloon drop honored 25 years of service, followed by a community gathering on the west lawn featuring food, music, games, and giveaways. Residents came together to celebrate the center's legacy as a cornerstone of connection and community.



OUT AND ABOUT

FACES FROM EVENTS AROUND THE VILLAGE

AUTISM AWARENESS & ACCEPTANCE CELEBRATION

The South Holland Police Department hosted the first Autism Awareness & Acceptance Celebration in July. Families enjoyed sensory-friendly activities, police and fire vehicle tours, resource vendors, workshops, and a free photo booth. Organized by the SHPD with community partners, the event fostered connection, support, and inclusion for individuals with autism and their families.



PARENT CONNECT

Parents and caregivers gathered for an evening of connection and support at Parent Connect, a free provider fair hosted by the South Holland Education Commission. Attendees explored resources from trusted local organizations offering services in academics, mental health, financial assistance, and technology. Highlights included a mini mental health workshop, valuable take-home materials, light refreshments, and raffle prizes.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS



September 20

FUN RUN 5K WALK/RUN

7:30am, Veterans Memorial Park
500 E 160th Pl

Join us for a fun and entertaining 5K run through the streets of South Holland. Costumes and accessories are encouraged. This event raises money for Intelligent & Ambitious Minds. Register at southholland.org.

October 4

COFFEE WITH FIREFIGHTERS

9am, SoHo Café, 16129 South Park Ave

Residents can meet and talk with members of the South Holland Fire Department on the first Saturday of every month. Note: This month's gathering meets at SoHo Café due to construction at the Fire Department.

October 7

PARADE OF LIGHTS

6:30pm, Thorn Creek Reformed Church
1875 E 170th St

The annual Parade of Lights honors the memory of South Holland firefighters and others who have fallen. Fire and rescue vehicles conduct a "lights only" parade to honor those who have experienced a fire, loss of life, or fire-related injuries. Residents are invited to stand along the route with candles or lights for this solemn remembrance.

October 11

BREAST CANCER WALK/DRIVE

9am, Veterans Memorial Park, 500 E 160th Pl

Join us for a walk and car caravan that recognizes both female and male breast cancer survivors. Following the walk, there will be a ceremony to celebrate and honor survivors. Register at southholland.org.

October 14

COMMUNITY POLICING MEETING

10am, South Holland Community Center
501 E 170th St

The South Holland Police Department hosts a Community Policing Meeting on the second Tuesday of every month, alternating mornings and evenings. This is an opportunity to address any questions or concerns for the Police Department.

October 23

HARVEST FEST

6pm, South Holland Community Center
501 E 170th St

South Holland families with children are invited to the Community Center for a special fall-themed event featuring a costume contest, dance party, pumpkin decorating, and more. Pre-registration is required. Visit the Community Center to register.

AT THE LIBRARY

The following programs are held at the South Holland Public Library,
16250 Wausau Ave, unless otherwise indicated.

September 20

NERDVANA

11am-3pm

Join the Library for Nerdvana, the Ultimate Fanfest. This free, family-friendly event is packed with fun for all ages, including cosplay, crafts, local artists and vendors, games, raffles, food trucks, and more. Whether you're into superheroes, storytelling, or strategy, there's something for everyone.

September 23

SHHH! IT'S NEPTUNE

7pm

On September 23, Neptune will shine its brightest—exactly 179 years after its 1846 discovery! We'll use the Library's telescope from our SHHH! Collection, and you're welcome to bring your own gear too.

September 24-October 22

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH: FLAVOR AND CULTURE

The Library is celebrating the vibrant cultures, traditions, and flavors of Hispanic Heritage Month! This year's theme, Flavor of Cultures/Cultural Flavors, highlights the delicious diversity of Hispanic cuisines and cultural expressions. Space is limited and you must register; supplies are limited.

October 23

TRICK OR TRIVIA

5-8pm, Thornton Distilling Co., 400 E Margaret St, Thornton

We're back at Thornton Distilling Co. for a hauntingly good time and delicious drinks! Bring your team (up to 6 players), wear your best costume, and test your Halloween knowledge.

October 31

MICKEY AND MINNIE'S NOT SO SCARY HALLOWEEN PARTY

12pm

Join us for a not-so-spooky Halloween party with Mickey and Minnie! Enjoy music, dancing, indoor trick-or-treating, and sweet family fun—plus photo ops with our costumed guests.

Winter Wonderland

Friday, December 5 • 6:00-8:00pm

Holiday festivities and activities
at Veterans Memorial Park

southholland.org

FAITH IN

Motion

GOD IS OUR RIDE-ALONG

By Reverend Wanda Simpson, Staff Chaplain at Ingalls Memorial Hospital

It was October that year, and life was pretty good. I had my first new car, a Toyota Corolla. I took a few vacation days and decided to drive up to Minnesota to visit my sister Iris. I had never driven that far before and I was alone. I was really nervous, and I started to turn around several times, but I had promised Iris that I was coming. I looked up to her and always wanted to show her how brave I was. It was 8:00 a.m. when I began the drive, and of course, I immediately took a wrong turn on the expressway. I had to turn around and get back on the highway and take the correct route. I told myself, "Great start," but now I was on my way. Whenever I'm alone, I usually end up having a conversation with God. That day, my conversation was a prayer for protection and guidance along the way.

October is not only my birthday month, but to me it is the most beautiful time of the year. After about four hours of nervously driving, I noticed that the landscape was going up and the forest lined both sides of the highway. I had seen beautiful fall colors before in the city, but never in such a condensed manner. I can still see the selection of colors perfectly melded together. It was like a forest rainbow of golds, yellows, oranges, red and green. Suddenly, I heard myself saying, "Thank you, God." I began to relax and felt reassured in those tense moments of driving that He was with me.

While we are living in these tumultuous times, it is a good opportunity to look for the natural beauty that surrounds us. The beauty tells us that God is still watching over us and is working things out for the



Reverend Wanda Simpson

good of His people. When we look up at the sun and the stars, when we feel the touch of the wind on our faces, and when our hearts feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, then we can be sure that He is with us. Yes, we are weary because for many this is the first time on this particular highway, but remember Matthew 11:28: "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." These are words of hope, a promise of God. We are not alone, because God is doing a ride-along with us.

When I arrived at my sister's house, I simply laid down and went to sleep. I rested. Now when I think about it, I believe that those same trees with their beautiful colors are still standing there today, lining the highway with their majesty. So, as long as they are there, as long as the sun shines and the stars glow, and the wind touches our faces and we feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, we can know that God is protecting and guiding us along the way.

HARVEST FEST

Thursday, October 23
6:00-7:30pm

South Holland Community Center

- Costume judging contest
- Candy bags (while supplies last)
- Games for children ages 3-12
- Craft projects
- Pumpkin decorating (bring a pumpkin from home)



Pre-registration is required and runs from September 9 - October 11

SPACE IS LIMITED!

This event is for South Holland Residents only. ID is required for registration.

GLORY DAYS ON THE

DIAMOND

FIFTY YEARS LATER, SOUTH HOLLAND'S 1975 BABE RUTH ALL-STARS REUNITE

By Kyli Williams



Fifty summers ago, a group of teenagers in wool uniforms dyed blue, white and red did something unforgettable for their hometown. The South Holland Babe Ruth All-Stars, a team of local boys ages 13 to 15, captured the 1975 Illinois State Championship, etching their names into community history.

This summer, the team reunited on the same South Holland field where they once played. Former players gathered to celebrate the milestone, reliving their glory days by hitting and throwing baseballs. They swapped stories, laughed, posed for photos and enjoyed the chance to be teammates again.

For many, the anniversary stirred memories of an exciting time of transition for South Holland. In the 1970s, the community was shifting from its agricultural roots into a growing suburban hub. Families moved into new neighborhoods, children rode bikes to local parks, and baseball was a constant. The Babe Ruth program was a rite of passage for young athletes who had outgrown Little League.

"There were no superstars," says Ross Howatt, who was just 14 when he joined the 1975 squad. "Everyone was equal. That's what made us strong."

That strength carried them through a season of heated rivalries, especially with nearby Calumet City, who had a history of beating South Holland. But when it came to the state tournament in Olney, Illinois, the All-Stars faced Oak Lawn, a powerhouse team known for producing players who went on to professional baseball. Against the odds, South Holland beat Oak Lawn not once, but twice in double elimination, clinching the title.



The 1975 South Holland Babe Ruth All-Stars, then and now



With the state championship secured, the team advanced to the Ohio Valley Regionals in Westland, Michigan. There, they fell short, losing two games and bowing out of the tournament. Still, the players' solidarity shone in a defining moment.

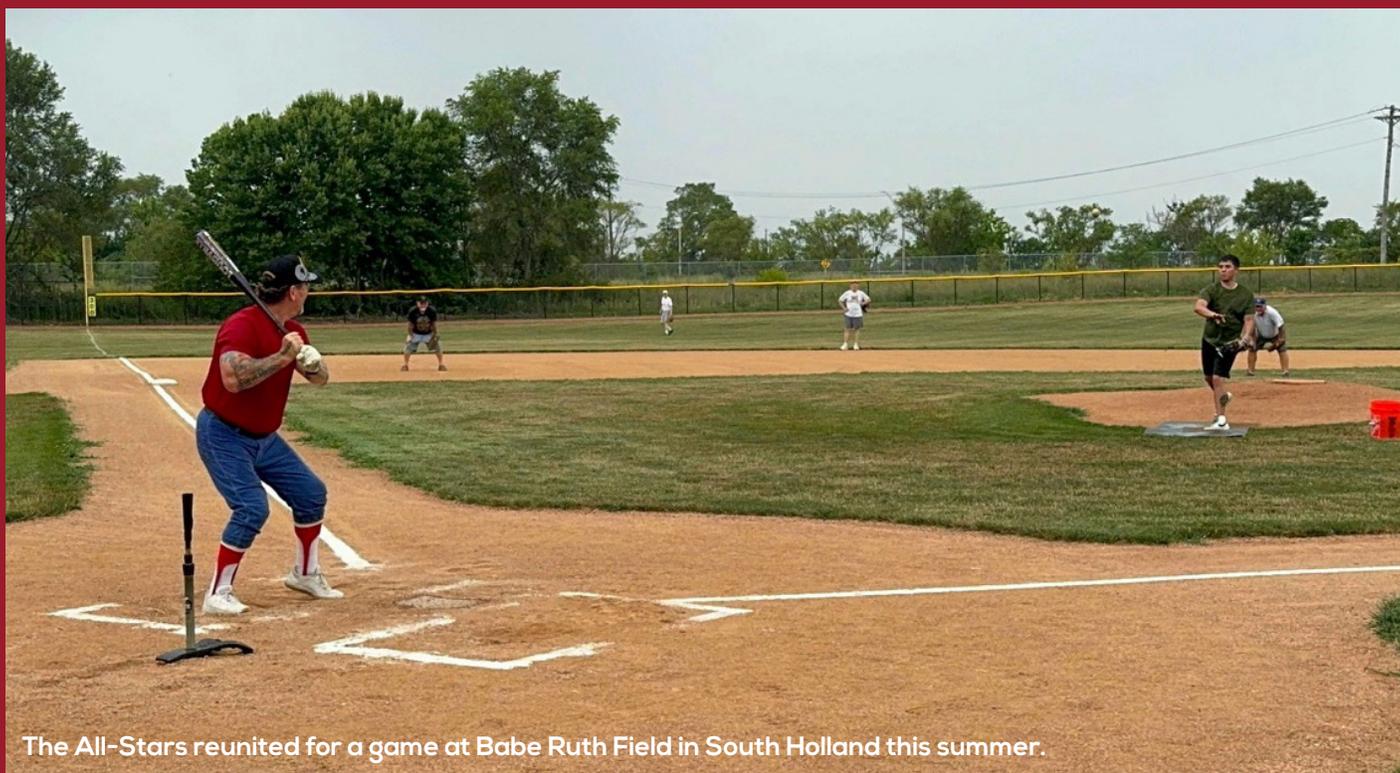
When officials called for the team captain to step forward and accept South Holland's award, no one moved. Instead, the entire roster rose and walked to home plate together, hand in hand. "I'll never forget that," says Howatt. "Everybody walked." Spectators wiped away tears. It was clear this was not a team built on individual stars, but on unity.

The team spirit of the Babe Ruth All-Star team sparked a wave of community pride in South Holland. Upon their return home from the regional championship, the All-Stars were surprised with a celebratory parade. Floats, fire engines and police cars rolled through town alongside Little Leaguers and Senior Babe Ruth players, honoring the team for their hard work. "I couldn't believe the turnout," says Howatt. The state champions rode together on a float, waving to crowds of residents that lined the curbs.

Memories of that summer stuck with the former Babe Ruth All-Stars. Players who once spent afternoons riding bikes to ballfields and playing "Sandlot"-style games in their neighborhoods went on to pursue lives across the country. Some, like Dave Kordeck, played professionally, while others continued through college baseball. A few stayed in the Chicagoland area, and some still call South Holland home. Others scattered to places like Georgia, Florida and Arizona.

Today, the Babe Ruth program no longer exists in South Holland. But the Little League tradition is alive and thriving. Next spring, the South Holland Little League will celebrate its 70th season, carrying forward the same love of baseball that united the All-Stars half a century ago.

As the 1975 players stood together once again this summer, taking swings on the same dirt where they once competed, the meaning of their story was clear. Their championship was not just about a trophy, but about the friendships, pride and community spirit that endure long after the last pitch. 🔥



The All-Stars reunited for a game at Babe Ruth Field in South Holland this summer.

INTELLIGENT AND AMBITIOUS

Minds

MENTORING INITIATIVE HELPS YOUNG GIRLS REACH FULL POTENTIAL
By Carrie Steinweg



When Rochelle Wilson was teaching sixth-graders in South Holland, she saw a need. “I recognized a dire need for social-emotional learning,” she says. “Many of my students were struggling with serious issues such as fighting, vaping, sexting and peer pressure. I started a girls’ empowerment club for my 6th graders and the impact was immediate.”

The program, Intelligent and Ambitious Minds (I.A.M.) Mentoring, launched in 2022 and quickly grew beyond the classroom into a community-based nonprofit. “We’ve since reached well over 100 girls in South Holland and surrounding communities. Our mission is to build confidence, teach emotional intelligence and empower young ladies to live with purpose over popularity.”

Having completed several SEL-focused trainings, Wilson became a Mental Health First Aider and trauma-informed educator. Along with her 15+ years of mentoring and 10+ years of teaching, she now trains volunteers and parents to become a community of “assets builders” who help girls identify



strengths, protect potential, and grow.

One of those parents is Tierra Burton, who is now a volunteer and Board Treasurer and CFO. Her daughter had been involved in the program for two years before she became an active volunteer. "Mrs. Wilson, through her careful strategies to uplift young girls, along with a phenomenal group of mentors, helped guide my daughter through some of her more difficult junior high years. From the practical life lessons, volunteer opportunities and opportunities to experience things we wouldn't do on a regular basis, such as horseback riding on a ranch and hosting game night for our elders at a local senior home, Intelligent and Ambitious Minds has undeniably helped my daughter strive to be more mature, thoughtful, focused and ambitious," she says. "During such a

challenging time of peer pressure and the desire to fit in, I'm not sure what I would have done without the support of the other moms in the program and her mentors. It's important to recognize that I.A.M is not just there for the girls. It's a foundation of support for families to help navigate the challenges of a growing young lady in today's world."

Sherita Grier-Bunn echoes those sentiments. Her daughter, Shanti, was one of the first three girls in the program. "The program has been awesome for my baby girl. I appreciate all the help," she says. "It has really advanced my daughter's life and helped her get on the right track. The older she's getting, her self-worth and self-dignity and self-love comes from this program."

She said the program came along at a crucial time. After her family relocated to the area, knowing no

one, and her daughter taking on the responsibility of helping take care of a disabled sibling, it gave her daughter “a safe open place to be herself and be free.” She has seen the positive impact in her daughter socially and academically in addition to the confidence boost it has provided.

“At I.A.M, young ladies are able to explore ideas and concepts that many times are not talked about or overlooked,” says Burton. “It gives girls an outlet to talk amongst their peers about real-life issues they face and gain valuable insight from their own peers and mentors. Outside of learning about socializing, peer pressure, and other social-emotional concepts, these girls are also learning about financial literacy, entrepreneurship, career exploration, leadership qualities, and so much more. The list honestly goes on and on, and I.A.M is adding to the list of opportunities that are offered regularly.”

Wilson is the author of *Purpose Over Popularity: Living Beyond Likes and Follows*, which is integrated into the program. “Some of the things in the book are spot on for how she was and how some girls feel without them telling you,” says Grier-Bunn. “From her detailed experiences in the book growing up, it is profoundly helpful.”

Grier-Bunn also appreciates the field trips offered, which have included everything from roller skating dates to movie nights to amusement park visits. She says her daughter has also enjoyed taking part in community projects with I.A.M, including clean-up projects, helping at the Greater Chicago Food Depository, and engaging with nursing home residents.

The program also covers self-care and etiquette workshops, STEAM activities, health and fitness activities, and exposure-based field trips that build leadership and entrepreneurship.

“Participants report increased confidence, stronger decision-making, and clearer purpose,” says Wilson. “Parents share that their daughters are more positive, motivated, and taking on leadership roles at school and in the community.”

This year, I.A.M. expanded to serve inner-city youth in Chicago, and Wilson continues to speak at national conferences about her book and mission to empower girls. 🔥



Rochelle Wilson, founder and CEO of Intelligent and Ambitious Minds

The next I.A.M session begins October 1 at the South Holland Community Center. It takes place on Wednesdays from 5-7pm and runs through December 3.

I.A.M will be the charity recipient of this year's Fun Run 5K on September 20. Register for the Fun Run at southholland.org or on site the morning of the event.

Serving IN THE Storms

SOUTH HOLLAND EMPLOYEES HELP COMMUNITIES HARD HIT BY NATURAL DISASTERS
By Julia Huisman



Over the past year, two areas in the U.S. were struck by disasters that uprooted lives and homes, forever reshaping families and communities there.

In September 2024, Hurricane Helene struck western North Carolina. The storm brought in 30 inches of rain, triggering massive mudslides that severely impacted homes and landscapes across that region.

On July 4, 2025, heavy rain caused major flooding in Kerr County, Texas, leading to more than 130 deaths (including, tragically, 36 children). The rapid flooding caused widespread damage throughout the entire county.

Following each storm, a team of employees from the Village of South Holland traveled to those communities for a week of disaster relief and restoration. Partnering with Samaritan's Purse, a faith-based



disaster relief organization, the team assisted with tasks such as clearing debris, demolition and rebuilding projects, and preparing spaces so that families could begin the process of rebuilding.

The team of Village employees consisted of individuals skilled in manual labor, including: J. Wynsma, Village Administrator; Police Chief Shawn Staples (North Carolina trip); Will Neibert, Administration; and Public Works employees Robert Aguilar, Eric Di Santo, Grant Gutierrez, and Gary Medema. Betsy Neibert, a nurse at Christ Hospital, also accompanied both trips, caring for the team by cooking, doing laundry, and lifting their spirits after exhausting days.

Samaritan's Purse has helped tens of thousands of families over the past three decades, rebuilding after devastation caused by tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, and fires. For the South Holland team, partnering with Samaritan's Purse not only brought structure to the relief efforts, but also the opportunity to work alongside other volunteers from all over the country.

It's been said, "Disasters bring strangers together in ways peace never could." Robert Aguilar, Municipal Fleet Manager for the Village, says he experienced this mystery firsthand when working on the teams. "I admire how complete strangers have come from all over the U.S. to assemble in one location and work as a team," he says. "By day two, everyone just knows what to do and jumps right in."

While it could be easy to pat themselves on the back for volunteering their time and energy to such a daunting task, every single member of the South Holland team instead describes the experience as "humbling."

"To help people at a very low moment and answer their call for help was an experience I'll remember forever," says Police Chief Staples. "I will forever remain grateful for the many blessings God has bestowed in my life. Being able to 'pay it forward' is an opportunity all children of God should practice and give to others throughout their lifetime."

Will Neibert agrees. "Being on the ground with residents who had lost so much reminded me how quickly life can change, and how important it is to show up for people in their time of need," he says. "It was hard work physically, but deeply rewarding to know that even small acts of service, like hauling debris or tearing down damaged walls, helped restore hope to families facing overwhelming circumstances."

For Grant Gutierrez, Facilities Manager, witnessing the fortitude of those impacted by the devastation is





what struck him the most. "It is easy to take things for granted and feel like things could be better or that we deserve more," he says. "Seeing what these folks have gone through, hearing their stories of loss and hardship—all while keeping a smile on their face—was very eye-opening. Even in the hardest of times, they maintained a positive attitude and banded together with others to reach a common goal of restoring a sense of normalcy in their lives."

After work on each house was completed, the homeowner was presented with a Bible signed by every volunteer who worked on the home. Gary Medema,

Master Carpenter, wrote in every Bible, "Love God, love your neighbor, serve God, serve your neighbor." He says, "This is how I try to live my life, whether on the job interacting with co-workers or South Holland residents, or when on these types of trips to help a neighbor a little farther away."

Following the North Carolina trip, Village Administrator J. Wynsma spoke about South Holland being the kind of community that comes to the rescue of other communities who are in dire straits. "We would certainly want others to come help our residents if South Holland were to find itself in such desperate circumstances," he says.

After having served in both North Carolina and Texas, and witnessing the extreme devastation that still exists, the South Holland team encourages other groups and communities to consider sending volunteers to help areas in need. Interested groups can visit the Samaritan's Purse website for information on how to get involved. Several other organizations also offer volunteer opportunities, such as World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and the American Red Cross.

Disaster can strike any community at any time. What helps people get through these devastating experiences, the South Holland volunteers learned, is the service of others.

WANT TO HELP?
Visit samaritanspurse.org
to learn how you can serve
communities all over the
U.S. impacted by natural
disasters.

"What we were really there doing, besides the manual labor, was serving people in their darkest and scariest times as Jesus did for us," says Eric DiSanto, Public Works Superintendent. "He was there for us when we needed him most, and that's our mission as we go on these trips, to be there for people. To stand with them, to listen to their story, to hug them and let them know that we'll get through this tragedy together." 🔥

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11TH ANNUAL

Military Tribute

THANKING OUR VETERANS

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5

SOUTH HOLLAND COMMUNITY CENTER
501 E. 170TH STREET
708.331.2940 • SOUTHOLLAND.ORG

Lunch: 10:30-11:30am • Program begins: 11:30am

Please register at the Community Center
by October 23.



southholland.org