

How One Brand-New Chick-fil-A Saved the Day

“Humbled,” she says once, then “Blessed.” “Humbled,” she says again.

Christy Blackwell is a 22-year-old college student, one of more than a dozen refugees taking shelter in Palate Coffee Brewery in downtown Sanford, Florida.

“Refugee” seems like an odd term, as the sun shines through the windows and those around her study or chatter idly. But most are there for the same reason: to escape Hurricane Irma’s aftermath.

Blackwell says she’s been out of school for the week due to the devastation around the city. Compared to others in the state, though, she’s “blessed” to have only lost her power and water. A few days without electricity “humbled” her, but it’s nothing the average third-world person hasn’t survived.

Though it’s a coffee shop, a familiar smell greets Palate’s customers: Chick-fil-A sandwiches.

“You want one?” the barista offers each customer who comes in, loaded with laptop and cellphone.

The owners and operators at the franchise just up the road dropped off the sandwiches earlier in the day to serve the community. When they found out Palate needed water, operator Bev Carroll one-upped the request.

The home of the original chicken sandwich aims to “To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us and to have a positive influence on all who come into contact with Chick-fil-A.”

It’s not the first time the fast-food chain has opened its

doors to serve. Frequently after natural disasters, the Chick-fil-A Foundation will swoop in and partner with local franchises to serve the community.

Carroll's franchise is less than a year old, but still, she wanted to help.

Carroll considers it both a faith and a business obligation to serve her community with her store's resources. She regrets not being able to help sooner, but the resources weren't available due to closed roads and downed power lines throughout the state.

"The core of who we are is to be generous," Carroll says of both her family and her company.

By talking with local law enforcement officers, Carroll and her team are now distributing food to those in need. At the restaurant, they opened a charging station. On Friday, Sept. 15, they'll host a block party of sorts for the community, full of games, food and giveaways.

It's about incorporating Christ into the community. Carroll says she sees His love all around her.

"God is everywhere [in the hurricane aftermath]," Carroll says. "It's evidenced in the spirit of the people who have opened their hearts and homes and are giving. God is evidenced through love. Houston showed this, and Florida is showing this, as well. As Christians, it's our job to tell people that Christ is not angry with them. This is a storm. As Christians, we should have open hearts and homes all the time."