

## The Star-Ledger

### Generosity with strings

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The grassroots, musician-led "Feel Good Tour" to replace instruments for school music programs in Gulf Coast communities still rebuilding from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina has spread to New Jersey through a Middlesex County folk artist who happened upon the cause by chance.

East Brunswick resident Michael Meade crossed paths with Bill Hudson, the Virginia-based leader of the tour, during the Asbury Park Clearwater Festival in August and immediately offered his help to the almost entirely word-of-mouth campaign. Meade has been promoting the cause during gigs for his band Lackawanna Rail throughout New Jersey and at solo stops for the singer-songwriter around the East Coast.

"It's a niche that other people aren't covering," said Meade. "The idea of these kids not having music in their daily lives, for them not to play clarinet or trumpet or pick up a guitar, that breaks my heart."

In the past few months, Meade has collected 10 instruments, though he hopes that number will grow before he departs next week for a trip with Hudson to Louisiana to distribute the latest haul of donations to music students. Hudson's previous trips have put about 50 instruments in children's hands to date.

"He told me what he was doing, and I was floored," said Meade, of the chance encounter over the summer. "I told him right there, 'I want to go.'"

**Hudson launched the "Feel Good Tour" shortly after Hurricane Katrina and enlisted the financial support of Dragonfly.com, a software company.** Hudson said he realized that once the immediate needs of rebuilding the area were under way, there would be an opportunity to assist those in the school music community.

"We all wanted to do something right after Katrina," said Hudson, who has made nine trips to the area to distribute instruments to the schools. "The way musicians do things is with music. Music is a great healer."

Maryellen Healy and her husband Vinnie Cerniglia of Pine Bush, N.Y., joined Hudson in February on one of his treks to deliver instruments. Healy, a teacher, said helping the people cope with their suffering through music was a life-changing experience.

"What we did was get instruments that no one was using and give them to people that had none to use. Can it get much better than that?" said Healy. "We had a concert, and afterwards the kids came up and asked for autographs. So you have to figure they appreciated what we were doing."

Hudson's latest trip with Meade is slated to begin Thursday, which is his deadline to gather additional donations, he said. So far, the donations include primarily guitars, and a banjo, Meade said. He is still searching for wind instruments often needed for school music programs including clarinets, horns and flutes. But Meade said he will take any instrument offered.

Meade and Hudson plan to visit at least three schools during the weeklong tour of some of the hardest-hit areas. They plan to coordinate with the local music directors to either donate the instrument to the school program or personally hand an instrument to a student. Hudson maintains an online blog

at [feelgoodtour.blogspot.com](http://feelgoodtour.blogspot.com) to provide a diary of their travels and photos.

Meade said he felt a particular connection to the "Feel Good Tour" cause because of the role school music programs played in his career. He grew up in East Brunswick and participated in the band program during middle school. Meade ran a local music store during his high school years.

"Music was an important part of my growing up," said Meade. "I believe that music is an important part in people's lives, especially in the development of kids."

He said he hopes at least one instrument he takes to Louisiana next week would inspire a student to explore talents that may have otherwise gone unrealized.

"What if I go down there, I take this banjo, I hand it to this kid. Ten years from now, that kid is on stage," said Meade. "I've been blessed to do something that I consider to be something meaningful."

*To donate an instrument, contact Meade through e-mail at [Mike@lackawannarail.com](mailto:Mike@lackawannarail.com) or call (732) 257-8743. For more information on Meade, go to his band website at [www.lackawannarail.com](http://www.lackawannarail.com). Hudson is also collecting instruments nationwide from his website, [www.bill-hudson.com](http://www.bill-hudson.com).*

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