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Program for disabled may go statewide

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HURRICANE GUIDE '06

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A North Fort Myers-based project to help disabled people during hurricanes could go statewide. No Person Left Behind asks disabled people to register with the Americans with Disabilities Act Advisory Board of Southwest Florida hurricane and disaster program. Volunteers check up on them during and after the storm.

Linda Carter, chairperson of the advisory board, said the program is expanding to cover all of South Florida as part of a pilot to see if it would be feasible at the state level.

"We're doing it now," she said.

Carter has been pushing the program for a decade. But she finally got it up and running right before Hurricane Charley struck Southwest Florida in August 2004.

"It's a very simple registration form," she said. "It lists everything we need to know about our people with disabilities."

If the program grows, Carter would like to set up an independent office with an automated computer system to make the calls and offer a menu of services. She said the program could be used year-round for educational purposes.

Carter has met with Lee County commissioners, businesses and city leaders in an effort to raise funds and obtain the necessary services.

After seeing disabled people stranded in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Carter began speaking with legislators about taking the program statewide. She estimates creating such a program would cost \$5 million.

No Person Left Behind would operate in conjunction with local special needs shelters during hurricane evacuation. Officials said the shelters are typically not very accessible to the disabled. In the past, there also have been some problems when families with autistic children have been evacuated to shelters, officials said.

The system also would be able to track evacuees around the country so there would not be anyone left unaccounted for, which was the case in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Carter said.

How to register

- Go online to www.nopersonleftbehind.org and complete the form.
- Call Linda Carter at 368-6846 to request a registration form.

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