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WKU alumni assist with Puerto Rico hurricane recovery

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Nov 24, 2017

As the fallout from hurricane season continues to affect Puerto Rico, three Western Kentucky University graduates are working to help rebuild the U.S. territory's ravaged power grid.

Matthew Brunt of Bowling Green, Tyler Jamison of Mount Eden and Jess Cary of Bowling Green are graduates of WKU's Department of Geography and Geology and are working through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to help with recovery efforts, a news release said.

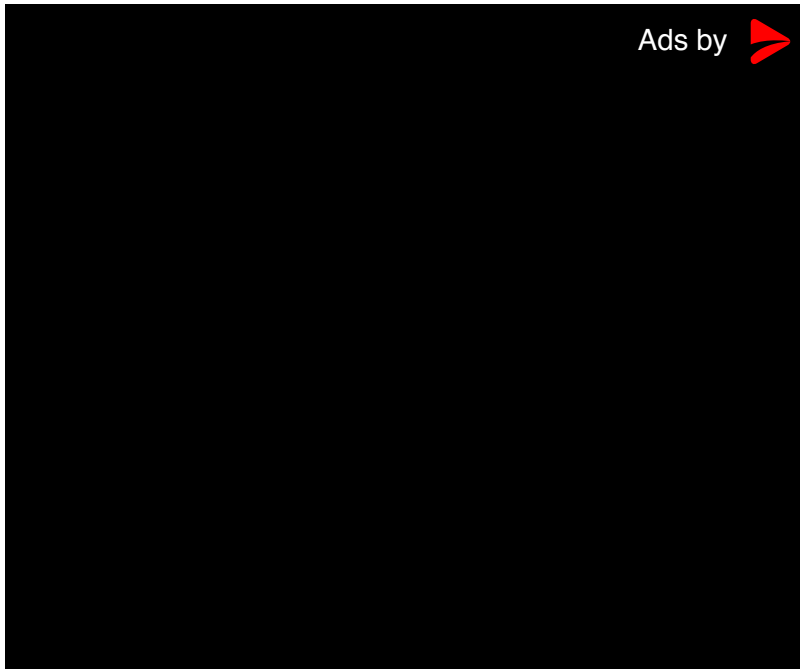
The group is using GIS, which stands for geographic information system technology. The technology combines computer technology and trained people to develop digital models of the world. It can help address community and regional problems and challenges, according to the Department of Geography and Geology.

Kevin Cary, a GIS instructor and the director of the GIS Center in WKU's Department of Geography and Geology, has kept in touch with the group as it has worked its way out from the capital San Juan and into rural Puerto Rico. Kevin Cary – who is Jess Cary's

brother – said text messages have been the only reliable way to communicate.

Aside from disaster recovery and relief, Kevin Cary said GIS technology has many uses.

“GIS is a very highly desirable skillset for anybody to have,” he said, adding that the system has broad applications and that WKU graduates with GIS skills go on to work for governments and a wide range of industries. Kevin Cary said GIS technology has been used to help with hurricane recovery efforts in the past.



David Keeling, a university distinguished professor of geography, said in a news release that “careers utilizing GIS skills are among the most attractive, well-paying and exciting opportunities for students seeking meaningful employment after graduation.”

He said the group’s efforts are helping save lives and rebuild infrastructure on the island.

“Our alumni’s activities demonstrate the value and importance of a spatial perspective on natural-disaster recovery efforts. Their GIS skills are facilitating a very localized and mappable understanding of power infrastructure and delivery challenges in Puerto Rico. As has been widely reported, the majority of Puerto Rico’s population remains without power weeks after the hurricane, and GIS is helping to speed along the recovery and rebuilding efforts.”

For more information about GIS at WKU, visit www.wku.edu/gis.

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Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.