When Time Stood Still

A County Extension Agent’s Experience in the Aftermath of Katrina

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OVERVIEW

• Personal Preparedness
• The Road Back to Ruin
• Organizational Response
• Key Observations
• Resources
PERSONAL PREPAREDNESS

What I did...

• Wednesday, Aug 25, 2005
  – Hurricane entered the Gulf of Mexico.
  – No Alarm.

• Thursday, Aug 26, 2005
  – Landfall expected Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf Coast.
  – Minor Chat in the office about approaching storm.
  – One email from MSU regarding computers.
• Friday, Aug 27, 2005
  – Extension staff exchanged cell phone numbers
  – Staff evacuation plans communicated
  – Computer and audio-visual equipment prepared
  – Supervisor contacted
  – Office closure at lunch
  – Staff prepares personal property

• Saturday, Aug 28, 2005
  – Removed NAS unit from office – Secured electronic files
  – Evacuated from coast
PERSONAL PREPAREDNESS

*What I would do differently...*

- Exchange alternate phone numbers outside local area with staff
- Designate staff check-in time after event
- Remove personal items from office and especially my contact information – Get your rolodex!
DEVASTATING BLOW

Could this happen in your State?

Sunday,
August 29, 2005

Katrina made landfall at Waveland, MS.
The Road Back to Ruin

- Return one week later
- Preparations for return
- Unbelievable destruction
- Tetanus and hepatitis shots
Extension Office Impact

- Hancock Co. Office
- Jackson Co. Office
- $100,000 equipment
- Hancock Ext. Staff
- Coast-wide Ext. Employees
- Southern Counties

Extension Office one block behind K-Mart

K-Mart during Katrina (Bay St. Louis - 2 mi. inland)
Could this be your office?

The County Agent

Update on Hurricane Katrina Relief

By: Mickey Cummings, NACAA President

I want to commend our NACAA family on your response to the Hurricane Relief Efforts of the past few weeks. As you know emails were sent to NACAA membership asking each of you to send monetary donations to our Treasurer, Chuck Schwartau. These checks were then forwarded on to a NASULGC committee. This committee would then disperse the funds to Extension Employees through the Extension Directors in the storm affected states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

NACAA has raised more than $13,000 for Hurricane victims in the affected states. But wait, there is more to come, there are some states still raising funds. I know of 2-3 states that will be donating money after events at their State Meetings. Some states have gone beyond the call to help its members. For example, the Alabama Association sent a load of fence posts so Mississippi Beef Producers could repair fences. I heard that Texas and South Carolina also sent needed items to the area. Florida Agents went to the region to retrieve County Agents in their daily routines. This allowed these agents to get some rest and to see to their families needs. I think that North Carolina also sent some Agents to the storm stricken areas to work.

You may still be interested in giving to this cause. It’s never too late. The people of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama will be hurting for a long time. In the latest report from Elmo Collum I learned that all the Employees of Extension in Mississippi have been accounted for and are safe. That’s great news. The last report from James Devillier in Louisiana indicated the same. However, the bad news is that some of these people lost their homes and many others had significant damage to their homes.

According to Elmo the towns of Waveland, Pass Christian and Bay St. Louis are completely gone. The Extension Office in Waveland was 3 years old and it no longer exists. The Hancock County Extension Office is now in a trailer and it is the only place in Waveland that has internet capability.

Devastation of the Hancock County Extension Service office located in Waveland, MS.

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Extension Clientele Impact

Could this happen to your clientele?

Homes destroyed:

- 100% Master Gardener’s

- 100% Mississippi Homemakers

- 50% 4-Hers
Extension Clientele Impact

• 80% pine timber

• Seven of eight dairy farms

• 100% beef cattle operations
Community Impact

Could this happen to your community?

50% of Hancock County flooded
Community Impact

Destroyed:

- 100% Government buildings
- 100% of the medical clinics
- First floor of hospital
Community Impact

Destroyed:

• Natural Resources
• 11 Schools
• Utility infrastructure
• Bridges, marinas, roads
ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE

What I did...

Nature of the County Agent’s new role is reactive.

• Office damage assessment

• Status of staff (Did not know for 4 weeks.)

• Community damage assessment (windshield version)
What I did…

- Located and offered assistance to local Emergency Management Command Center
- Communicated with Board of Supervisors
- Assisted county workers
- Located an alternative office facility (tent)
- Developed a flexible staffing plan
What I did...

- Opened Satellite Mobile unit to public
- Kept list of needs (individuals & institutions)
- Kept list of resources
- Kept list of relief organizations and their services
What I did...

- Identified projects and managed numerous volunteer groups
- Conducted many tours
- Hired three local work grant workers
- Liaison to University - County Agent is essential to engage University at all levels
What I did…

• Participated in many radio, newspaper and magazine interviews nationwide.

• Managed financial donations through existing accounts (e.i. 4-H, Cattlemen’s, Master Gardeners)

• Directed loads of relief supplies to volunteer centers, schools and pet emergency relief center.
What I did...

Education Programs:

- Forestry Tax Workshop 21
- Options for Cattle Producers Post-Katrina 150
- Daycare as a Business Seminar (3 days) 26
- Landscaping Seminar 14
- Urban Forestry Restoration Workshop 35
ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE

What MSU Extension did...

Staff Relief:

– Emergency shelter (RV campers)

– Invitation to park and hook up camper at Area Office

– Help from co-workers to hook up camper utilities

– Donations from co-workers: clothes, groceries, household items
What MSU Extension did...

- Adequate time off for employees

- Help from *Bulldogs in Response* teams to cleanup homes and properties

- Staff received various grant monies from MSU Extension, 4-H Foundation and MS County Agent’s Association
What MSU Extension did...

– Provided storage pods (most needed – invaluable!)

– Salary and job assurance

– Emergency cell phone issued

– Satellite Classroom Mobile Unit provided for emergency office
What MSU Extension did...

– Allowed me to hire a County Agent assistant in December 05

– Two office modules provided in January 2006 (County could not provide.)

– MSU Counselors provided for Extension employees
ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE

What I’m glad I did:

• Saved the office documents (removed NAS Unit)

• Communicated with Board of Supervisors often

• Identified needs through Extension Advisory Board (individual calls, visits and meeting)
What I’m glad I did:

• Helped county employees
• Set up temporary office where people were
• Provided public access to satellite internet
• Helped people that I didn’t know
• Met many God-sent volunteers
What I’m glad I did:

• Received tetanus and hepatitis shots upon return

• Received counseling (Supervisor recommendation for Coastal Counties Extension Staff).

• No matter how great or small the need, I asked and got it.
ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE

What I would do differently:

• Set up a separate account for relief funds
• Take more pictures
• Better documentation on daily basis
• Take Sundays off
• Take contact information with me
The County Extension Agent is a key community leader that is a position to help many individuals and the community.

As the saying goes,

“Put your own mask on first, then help others.”
Overall Key Observation:

#2

Take your disaster plan seriously.

No Extension office should be dependent on one person from the stricken area after a disaster.
Overall Key Observation:

#3

As a County Agent, you will have calls and donations from all over the country. The most important role a County Agent will fill to help thousands of people is that of a resource manager.
RESOURCES

Handouts:

- Specific list of Relief Efforts/Projects

- Local and Statewide Extension Disaster Response Plan Recommendations
RESOURCES

Websites for Disaster Preparedness:

• FEMA http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/
   Are You Ready Guide, Community and Family Preparedness

• American Red Cross http://www.redcross.org/
   Disaster Preparedness & Disaster Services

• Sun Herald Newspaper http://www.sunherald.com/
   Current Rebuilding Issues

• GA Emergency Management www.gema.state.ga.us

• MS Emergency Management www.msema.org/preparedness
Oh, I forgot …

For an exciting and challenging career, Mississippi State University is looking to hire a qualified County Agent for Hancock County, MS!

No application will be refused!
ANY QUESTIONS?
WHEN TIME STOOD STILL

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