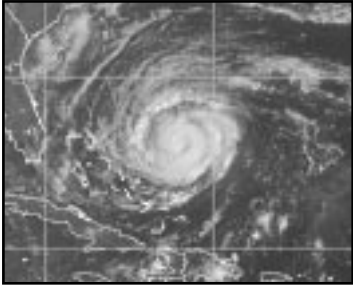


HATS OFF!

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Hats Off... ...to Jacksonville!

We'll always remember 2004 as the year hurricanes targeted Florida. From weak little Bonnie which spawned a local tornado, to powerful Charley which surprised folks south of us with unexpected force, to humongous Frances which covered the entire state and then some, to vicious Ivan which terrorized us and caused inestimable damage over a large portion of our hemisphere, to destructive Jeanne which traced Frances' path across the state, to Karl and Lisa which, thankfully, eventually dissipated in the Atlantic - everyone in Florida has been affected in one way

or another.

Although Jacksonville didn't suffer the brunt of the hurricanes' strength, the tropical force winds (with gusts at hurricane level) and copious amounts of rain left local residents with varying degrees of damage or discomfort. Many structures were physically damaged, and because so many of our area's beautiful trees were broken or uprooted, power lines were damaged all over town leaving hundreds of thousands in the dark.

Throughout all the anxious days of wondering if we'd be hit, waiting for the storms to make landfall, experiencing the storms themselves, then working through the aftermath, many people in our community worked around the clock to restore order from the chaos.

Reporters were everywhere

Most visible to all of us were members of the media. It

seemed that every reporter, meteorologist, photographer and anchorperson (and everyone else necessary to make the newscasts possible) was always on hand to keep us continually informed of every aspect of the storm and its consequences. Thank you so much for all your hard work; we really appreciate it.

Because electricity is absolutely vital for our way of life, restoring power was a top priority. As soon as the winds from Frances abated enough for crews to work, JEA personnel were dispatched to begin their enormous task. JEA spokesman Ron Whittington says 500 linemen worked 18-hour days, seven days a week, while tree crews worked 12-hour shifts clearing fallen trees and limbs. On Labor Day alone, JEA phones logged 150,000 calls. In ensuing days, customer service groups of 3's and 4's went out into the community to talk firsthand with consumers still without power. To all those who turned our lights back on - we thank you.

According to JFRD spokesman Tom Francis, firefighters contributed extra equipment and man hours to help restore power, in addition to their workload which increased because of the storm.

Fire Station No. 28 alone responded to 44 calls on Sunday (the day Hurricane Frances hit), which was indicative of activity at all stations. Increased staffing (utilizing new recruits at the academy) and small, maneuverable brush trucks equipped with chain saws were pressed into service. All 911 calls reporting downed wires were routed through the JFRD, and crews assisted with removal of trees and limbs after ensuring residents were safe.

"We're blessed it was not worse"

So many people labored in the aftermath of these storms, it's impossible to list every one. When asked for his input about those who should be recognized, JSO Public Information Officer (PIO) Ken Jefferson responded, "We were very blessed by God that this storm (Frances) was not any worse. You can start off by commending the men and women who worked in the EOC [Emergency Operations Center] who kept the Sheriff and Mayor apprised of everything that was happening in the city during the course of events. JSO Officers, JEA workers, Public Works, JFRD, personnel from the Mayor's Office all worked together for public safety, restoring power, cleaning debris. We, of course, had officers on standby to be called out if necessary. There was actually a drop in crime during these times. The citizens of Jacksonville, as well as all of the above-named agencies, came together and cooperatively got things done."

JSO PIO Rick Wood noted, "Due to the power being off for many days after the storm, officers were posted at various intersections around the city for up to four days. They were careful to check on special needs folks in their areas of patrol and refer them according to areas of assistance."

Coast News said their station received many calls from people wanting to know how they could help - small business owners saying they had extra plywood for boarding windows, residents with power offering their freezers or ice to those without, the man who extended his water hose to the street and invited those who needed water to help themselves.

Firefighters filled a trough with water for several horses that would not have survived otherwise, according to their grateful owner. Many volunteers assisted city agencies, including our own Ted Hires who worked with JFRD to remove downed trees from houses and driveways, enabling residents to get out. Others opened their homes to evacuees, the elderly or those with special needs. J.B. Coxwell Contracting dispatched five trucks and crews for the cleanup effort, happy for the opportunity to help the community during the crisis.

Food Lion donated truckloads of ice, water, snack foods and juice to assist hurricane victims in the Jacksonville area, and they also donated store gift cards to help families in need after the storms. Other area supermarkets and stores donated items, offered discounted merchandise and contributed to relief agencies. The City of Jacksonville set up comfort stations, while charitable and relief organizations and churches tried to ensure that no one was hungry or without shelter. Christian Smith of the American Red Cross probably didn't have a day off for weeks - she provided multiple daily media interviews to keep us all informed of services available.

And so many more that we don't even know about. But to one and all - our hats are off for a job well done.

- Shirley Shaw



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