

Cameron will rise again!

The Cameron Parish

Pilot

October 6, 2005

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35¢



CAMERON STATE BANK and First Baptist Church in Cameron are shown. (Photo by Mike Sellers.)

Rita levels lower Cameron Parish

By CYNDI SELLERS

Cameron Parish's worst fears were realized when Category 3 Hurricane Rita moved ashore between Johnson Bayou and Sabine Pass, Tex., late Friday evening, Sept. 23. The storm, which had been a Category 5 for some time in the Gulf of Mexico, ground slowly ashore with winds up to 120 mph.

Most of Cameron Parish was in the path of the east eyewall of the storm, the area of highest damage.

The result was catastrophic. The slow moving system pushed a storm surge of 18-20 feet ashore east of Johnson Bayou, washing away homes and businesses all the way to the east end of Grand Chenier. During the 12 hour passage of the storm, wind and waves pounded buildings to pieces, leaving nothing but empty slabs or piles of rubble in most places.

Most local observers said the destruction was even worse than Hurricane Audrey in 1957, which was a category 4 storm with winds up to 140 mph. Many buildings which withstood Hurricane Audrey were totally demolished by Rita.

On Sunday the first observers were able to fly over the parish and assess the damage. Early results showed Holly Beach and Constance Beach totally destroyed. In the town of Cameron, 90% of the buildings were estimated to be destroyed or unusable. Creole and Grand Chenier were much the same.

Johnson Bayou lost 60% of

its structures. Grand Lake and Hackberry suffered extensive damage. The Court House in Cameron, however, was still standing. Water had not even gotten into the top two floors.

The only bright spot in this dismal picture is that parish officials were able to effect an almost complete evacuation of the parish before the storm, with the result that no lives were known to have been lost in Cameron Parish. The tragic deaths which resulted from Hurricane Audrey, and the recent Hurricane Katrina in southeastern Louisiana, were not repeated.

Cameron Parish Office of Emergency Preparedness Director Freddie Richard had ordered an evacuation on Wednesday morning, which allowed residents two days to move to safety.

On Friday morning, the Sheriff's Office and OEP moved to Calcasieu Parish to wait out the storm. Sheriff's deputies reported that only four people were known to have remained in Cameron, and they apparently spent the night in the vestibule of the courthouse, finding their way out when the winds dropped.

As Cameron Parish prepares to once again rebuild itself from the ground up, most people are just thankful that everyone is safe. "All the material possessions can be replaced," said one resident, "but lives cannot."

AFTER THE STORM
Cameron Parish disaster

response teams moved quickly to set up a base of operations at Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge Visitor's Center north of the Intracoastal Canal was not flooded, and generators provided limited power. National Guard units began to arrive immediately. The 41st Infantry Brigade from Oregon and the 225th Engineer Group from Fort Polk, under the command had been staged in Lafayette to provide immediate assistance.

On Monday Lt. General Russel Honore toured the parish and began to assign assets to begin the rebuilding of the parish. Blackhawk and Chinook helicopters flew in and out of the refuge parking lot.

A path was cut through the mats of marsh grass which had floated across Highway 27 south of the Gibbstown Bridge, allowing military vehicles to travel along the still flooded roadway to get a look at the devastation on the ground.

By Wednesday the water had receded on Hwy. 27 all the way into Cameron, and houses and debris had been moved off the road. East Creole and Little Chenier were still under water; Trosclair Road was not passable, and Grand Chenier was inaccessible.

In west Cameron, a 100 foot section of Hwy 27 at Kelso Bayou had washed out, but parish crews moved swiftly to fill in the gap, allowing officials to assess the damage.

Cont. on Page 2.



CAMERON PARISH officials met at Cameron Prairie Refuge on Monday, Sept. 26 to coordinate response to the destruction of Hurricane Rita. (Photo by Mike Sellers.)

Jury tells plans for recovery

On Monday, Oct. 4 a Special Meeting of the Cameron Parish Police Jury was held at the Cameron Prairie Refuge Headquarters south of Sweetlake. In attendance were local leaders, Congressman Boustany, and approximately 100 parish citizens. The meeting laid out the way ahead for Cameron Parish's Recovery.

The Police Jurors approved the following critical tasks that begin the recovery process:

Full time operation of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and movement to the Cameron Courthouse was approved.

Parish will hire a full time operations officer for EOC for continuity purposes in the immediate future.

The Parish agreed to give FEMA the approval to have the debris removal contract given to the Corps of Engineers. They determined the next "Look and See" dates for the community (Oct. 8-9 and October 14-16).

Oct. 16 will be the last date to remove or to view their property prior to the commencement of debris removal.

The decision was made to request the Corps of Engineers to do "Blue Roofs" for the Parish. If anyone has a roof and wants it covered free of charge, with a blue covering, the individual homeowner can call 1-888-ROOF BLU.

Also attending the meeting in addition to the people of Cameron and Rep Boustany were members of the U.S. Army, the Corps of Engineers, National Guard, FEMA, the State of Louisiana Office of Public Assistance, the State Police and others who have helped Cameron in

its time of need.

Additionally, there are two distribution centers: Hackberry Community Center and the Grand Lake Community Center. These are available for food, water and ice. MCI has established phone banks there as well. Next week they will also be the site of the Disaster Recovery Centers.

A Base Camp for first responders and workers has been established in Cameron and will be fully operational this week.

The Police Jury will hold weekly meetings at Cameron Prairie Refuge, each Monday at 1:30 p.m.

Leslie Trahan of South Cameron Hospital said all employees will continue to get

paid. The hospital will be setting trailers in Grand Lake within the next few weeks, she said. Also, trailers will be set up to house nursing home patients.

Parish Librarian Charlotte Trosclair said the Grand Lake and Hackberry branch libraries are intact and functioning and ready to serve patrons.

Carl Broussard, the parish Clerk of Court, said a temporary office will be set up at 302 N. Cutting Ave. in Jennings. The office should be operational by the end of the week. Its phone numbers will be 616-9666 and 616-9667. Court proceedings will take place in Calcasieu Parish, he said.

Restoring power will be a massive job here

By DORIS MARICLE
AMERICAN PRESS

Though Hurricane Rita wiped out much of Cameron, Holly Beach, Johnson Bayou, Creole and the Oak Grove areas, Jeff Davis Electric general manager Mike Heinen says electrical service to the hard-hit areas will be restored.

"We see hope for the people of Cameron Parish," Heinen said. "As soon as electricity is restored to the area, it will be livable again and life can return to normal. It will just take some time, but the hope is there."

"During an emergency meeting of the Jeff Davis Electric board of directors last week, I was given a directive to do whatever it takes to

build Cameron back," he said. It won't be an easy task, Heinen said. It will be a major rebuilding project, and it will take months.

It's a challenge Heinen is not facing alone, however. Nearly 300 utility trucks are headed to lower Cameron Parish to bring life back to the area.

"These crews will be working en masse," he said. "They're not going to stop 'til the job is finished."

The cooperative is getting emergency restoration line crews from 15 states representing 72 electric cooperative companies to help restore power to the hurricane-battered area.

"We are working to rebuild

Cont. on Page 2.

School plans told

On behalf of members of the Cameron Parish School Board, Dr. Doug Chance announces the following information for Cameron Parish residents and all school employees as a result of Hurricane Rita.

1. All students will have the opportunity to complete the 2005-2006 school year as Cameron Parish students;

2. The school calendar will be adjusted as needed due to the "Hurricane Rita" disruption;

3. Bus transportation will be expanded to accommodate the temporary housing locations for Cameron students

(out of parish as necessary and appropriate);

4. Employees are being considered fully employed with benefits since the school year will be completed;

5. The 2005-2006 school year will be continued with multiple schools in session at locations in Grand Lake and Hackberry as soon as safety and electrical service issues are resolved;

6. Plans are being structured to conduct 2005-2006 graduation and commencement ceremonies for each of the four high schools; i.e., a senior of rand Lake will be a graduate of Grand Lake; a

senior of Hackberry will be a graduate of Hackberry; a senior of Johnson Bayou will be a graduate of Johnson Bayou; and, a senior of South Cameron High School will be a graduate of South Cameron High School; and,

7. Extra and co-curricula activities and practices will begin as soon as safety and electrical issues are resolved.

Further announcements will be made to the media and announcements will be posted on the web site for Cameron Parish Schools at www.cam-sch.org beginning Friday, Sept. 30, 2005. Employee email will be available at that time.



IT WILL BE quite some time before the Cameron Post Office will be usable. (Photo by Mike Sellers.)



MARSHALL STREET in Cameron has been changed immensely. (Photo by Mike Sellers.)

Funeral

MARY H. SWEENEY

Mary Hale Sweeney, 75, died Friday, Sept. 23, 2005, in a Lake Charles hospital.

She was a native of Corpus Christi, Tex., and had lived in Grand Chenier for more than 45 years.

Survivors include her son-in-law, Glenn Duddleston of Grand Chenier; two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her husband, G. C. Sweeney; and a daughter, Virginia Duddleston.

Her funeral was held Monday, Oct. 3, in Highland Memory Gardens under the direction of Hixson Funeral Home. The Rev. Gary Evers officiated.



DA'S OFFICE in Cameron. Six inches of mud got on the floor and the water level got to the lettering above my head: 38th Judicial District.

(Photo courtesy of William Daigle.)



HWY. 27 south of the Gibbstown Bridge was covered with water on Monday, Sept. 26 as General Honore's convoy moved deeper into Cameron Parish to assess damage. Huge mats of marsh grass covering the roadway had to be cleared ahead of the vehicles. (Photo by Mike Sellers.)

Grandparents Day observed

Grand Lake High celebrated Grandparents Day on Friday, Sept. 16. Grandparents enjoyed lunch and classroom activities with their grandchildren.

Election is cancelled

The Cameron Parish School Board election scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 15 for the purpose of considering the renewal of a 10 mill property tax has been cancelled due to Hurricane Rita, according to Supt. Doug Chance.



Lagniappe Two Retirement Home Living Notes

By Geneva Griffith



We had our monthly social this week down at the clubhouse. We had two wonderful baked chicken dinners and all the trimmings. We had a full house with everyone here in the village, including those we have played bridge and bingo with.

A dead bird was found that had West Nile here at the village, so all the grounds were sprayed for mosquitos. We had to stay in our condos for two hours following the spraying. I was surprised because I haven't seen a bug or mosquito since I have been here. However, we have monthly spraying in our homes by the maintenance men.

Beau jumped off my bed

and injured his back. He moped around all week and I realized that he is a Dachsund or "weiner dog" and is prone to have a weak back, so the doctor and I have him on some powerful pills. His back finally healed, but he has slowed down considerably.

Beau is in love with his "doggie bed". We have decided that it is best since he will not be able to jump down and reinjure his back. He doesn't realize he is getting older and weaker.

The President has promised to rebuild the Gulf Coast. I'm sure that will include Cameron. We must not let him forget it.

I see where Rev. Billy Graham has offered his New Orleans home to evacuees. He said Christians all over the U. S. have opened their homes to the survivors, according to his son Rev. Franklin Graham.

Pvt. Racca is graduated

Army National Guard Pvt. Daniel R. Racca has graduated from basic combat training at Fort Jackson, Columbia, S.C.

During the nine weeks of training, the soldier studied the Army mission, history, tradition and core values, physical fitness, and received instruction and practice in basic combat skills, military weapons, chemical warfare and bayonet training, drill and ceremony, marching, rifle marksmanship, armed and unarmed combat, map reading, field tactics, military courtesy, military justice system, basic first aid, foot marches, and field training exercises.

Racca is the son of Steve O. Racca Jr. of Cameron.

He is a 2005 graduate of South Cameron High School.

Hurricane... Cont. from Pg. 1

The Causeway Bridge at the state line was damaged, and a road block was set up to prevent anyone from crossing. West Cameron fire, ambulance and law enforcement personnel had found refuge at the Best Western motel in Sulphur and were ready to move their vehicles back into the parish as soon as the roads were passable.

Roadblocks were set up at all entrances to the parish to prevent looting and protect the public from unsafe conditions.

ONE WEEK LATER

On Friday, one week after the storm, parish residents were allowed into the area for the first time, to assess the damage to their homes and businesses. Some side streets had been cleared. Most people returned to find a landscape out of a nightmare. It was hard to be sure just where you were sometimes, since all familiar landmarks were changed or just missing.

House after house was just not there anymore. No structure remained in Holly Beach; the scene resembled that of Hurricane Audrey's aftermath.

In Cameron, west of the elementary school no buildings on the south side of the street remained. Schools, churches, and libraries were gutted or demolished.

And, just as in Audrey, cemeteries were disturbed. An estimated 120 coffins were washed out across the parish. Remains were being collected and taken to Lake Charles for identification under the direction of parish coroner Dr. Richard Sanders, who assured families that the remains were being handled with dignity and respect.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Today, the first steps into recovery have been taken with the move by parish government into the parish court house. Phones have been set up for all agencies involved in the recovery to use. Parish government can be reached at 775-5815. Other numbers are 775-5306, 775-5609, and 775-5940. Officials are asking all parish employees to get in touch with their supervisor or call one of these numbers to arrange to get back to work.

The volunteers with OEP who have been working non-stop since before the storm are ready to turn the parish back over to regular agencies so they can get back to their jobs as well.

A base camp has been set up at Cameron Recreation Center on Trosclair Road to house recovery workers. Air conditioned tents, portable showers, hot meals, and sanitary facilities have been moved in and the facility has been renamed Camp Cameron.

National Guard units from Alabama and South Carolina have set up camp at the Cameron Motel and the Family Dollar store in Cameron. Law enforcement officers from Travis County, Tex., and Rapides Parish Sheriff's Departments are providing much needed support for the Cameron Sheriff's office.

Hundreds of electrical crews are working throughout the parish to replace bent, broken or missing utility poles. Natural gas workers have moved to close many gas leaks from homes and businesses; various damaged oil and gas wells have been capped. Water systems in Cameron and Johnson Bayou have been assessed and are ready to be turned on.

The ferries at Cameron are not in service at this time. A large boat is jammed against the west Cameron landing.

Residents have begun to move back into Hackberry and Grand Lake in a very limited way. There is no power, and no drinkable water in the parish, however, and a curfew is strictly enforced from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

THE FUTURE

OEP Director Freddie Richard has announced that residents will have two more weekends to enter the parish and remove possessions. This Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 8-9, and next Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, Oct. 14, 15, and 16, residents will be able to enter the parish between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. to retrieve and secure whatever they can. Beginning Monday, Oct. 17, the Corps of Engineers will be in charge of demolition and clean up of debris.

Residents are asked to contact their insurance companies and get an adjuster to their property as soon as possible, but crews will wait if the adjuster has not made it to some houses.

Richard asked the public to stay away during the week to allow electrical crews to have room to work. Many roads have no shoulders and there are washed out areas. Leaving the weekends for residents will help alleviate the traffic problems which occurred this week.

If all goes well, more days could be added for public access, Richard said. Returnees are reminded to watch for snakes and other wildlife. Those who have houses to clean up are reminded not to mix ammonia and chlorine bleach, as poisonous fumes will result.

By next week the Emergency Operations Center in the court house will be fully operational, with representatives of all agencies involved in recovery having their own area in the court room.

Power

Cont. from Pg. 1

every transmission and distribution line 'til we get it all rebuilt," Heinen said.

He said areas of Grand Lake are ready to take on electricity, but have to wait for repairs to be made to other systems.

"This is the worst I've ever seen, and I have been here 20 years," Heinen said of the devastation.

He said 10 cooperative employees, including two from the board of directors, and their families lost their homes in the storm. The cooperative has arranged temporary housing to help keep the families together as employees continue the restoration project.

To assist in the restoration process, Heinen said instant tent cities—capable of housing, feeding and providing laundry services—have been set up at Chennault International Airport in Lake Charles and the fairgrounds in Jennings for the hundreds of crews working long shifts to restore electricity.

There will be two Disaster Recovery Centers in the parish, at the Hackberry Community Center and the Grand Lake Community Center. These sites are presently being used for distribution of food, water, ice and clothing, but by next week should be fully staffed by representatives of FEMA, the Small Business Administration, and the Red Cross to meet the needs of returning Cameron Parish residents. At some point, another DRG will open in Cameron, at the Base Camp on Trosclair Road.

Grief counseling services are being provided to those who have been working so long in the devastated area, most of whom have lost everything they have and have been separated from their families during the whole ordeal.

The clean-up will be monumental, the rebuilding will take a long time, and not everyone will be up to it, but many have vowed to return and restore Cameron Parish.

Festival open

The Texas Renaissance Festival located in Plantersville, Tex. began its 31st season opening as scheduled Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 1 and 2. The festival site sustained no damage during the high winds of Hurricane Rita.

Wilfred Benitez is the youngest world champion in boxing history. He was 1712 when he won the light-welterweight title in his home island of Puerto Rico in 1976.

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MILITARY VEHICLES gave officials their first view of Cameron's main street. (Photo by Mike Sellers.)



THE US FISH and Wildlife Service Hurricane Response Team, though primarily USFWS employees, has members from the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and a number of State agencies throughout the southeast. Approximately 50 individuals and a broad spectrum of equipment and supplies have contributed to the local relief effort in and around Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes in Louisiana. (Photo courtesy of Gator Smith, USFWS.)

National wildlife refuges badly damaged by Rita

By BONNIE STRAWSER
Information Officer
U. S. Fish & Wildlife

As residents of the Rita and Katrina-affected areas of Louisiana return home, find some means of surviving the requirements of just living from day to day, and begin to get back into their regular routines, some of the less-life-threatening, but nonetheless quality-of-life impacting situations will inevitably come to the forefront. Among these situations, the impact of the storms, and, more detrimental, the impact of some of the results of the storms on wildlife and habitat in the area will become apparent.

The Southwestern Louisiana Refuge Complex, which includes Cameron Prairie, Lacassine, and Sabine National Wildlife Refuges, will suffer the effects of Rita for years to come.

Asked to summarize these impacts, Refuge Biologist Steve Reagan explained, "As we get past the damage to our homes and towns and move forward with recovery in these areas, we are all starting to notice the affect the storm has had on our local fish and wildlife as well as our coastline. Freshwater fish are floating within many of our waterways because of saltwater intrusion or oxygen depletion.

The carcasses of deer, muskrat, otter, alligators and other terrestrial wildlife dot the landscape because they could not escape the hurri-

cane's tidal surge. Hurricane Rita's damaging winds affected our local birds too. Among those that survived, many have broken wings or damaged legs.

Other wildlife without obvious bodily damage are also casualties of Hurricane Rita. Much of their habitat on which they were dependent for their daily needs has been destroyed by salt water or coated with toxic materials including gas and oil. Louisiana's coast has also pushed farther inland decreasing the amount of marshlands within our area."

Reagan continued, "Even though the winds are gone and the sun now shines, some damage will continue to occur. Oxygen will continue to decline within local waters as the plant material in these waters decays.

Southwest Louisiana is also very important to many species of wildlife that are soon to arrive, migratory waterfowl and neotropical songbirds. Louisiana coastal bottomland hardwoods offer some of the last food and rest available to these birds prior to their flights across the Gulf of Mexico. The effects of the saltwater surge and high winds on these forests are just now becoming apparent. Some trees will not be able to survive the increased salinities."

The impact will continue as the seasons change and new years begin their life cycle of these wildlife species. Reagan added, "Louisiana is

also home to many colonial nesting birds including pelicans, herons, and egrets.

Each of which has been effected by Hurricane Rita. Much but not all of Louisiana's fish and wildlife habitats will heal. This is not the first hurricane to our area, nor will it be the last. Recovery takes time, and what does return may not be exactly what was there before."

Project Leader for the Complex of national wildlife refuges, Don Voros, described the damages to refuge facilities. "The majority of the facilities at Sabine National Wildlife Refuge have been irreparably damaged. It is our hope that the existing structures can be demolished, the sites cleared of debris, and new structures can be constructed immediately. But, we're aware that 'immediate' isn't something we can expect with this much damage at the refuge and throughout the community.

At Lacassine and Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuges, we are still assessing damages to the buildings. It appears that the structures at these sites may still be salvageable and in some cases fully functional. Voros added, "The Service had more than a dozen families in the Rita-impacted area whose homes are not livable. We've had a FWS Hurricane Response Team in the area since the day after the storm passed. And, they've done a remarkable job of taking care of our employees and their families.

All employee families have some sort of roof over their heads, at this point-- and some sort of power, and at least minimal bathroom facilities. And, we're thankful for that." In addition, the team is aiding local residents by clearing debris from their driveways, providing tarps for roofs, helping ranchers find cattle via helicopter, serving as a staging area for feeding and watering cattle via helicopter, taking residents to their homes by airboat when possible and providing the Cameron Parish Emergency Operations staff, FEMA, National Guard, U. S. Army and government officials with a temporary site to operate from at Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge.

Cameron Prairie, Lacassine, and Sabine National Wildlife Refuges will remain closed to all public recreational activities until further notice. Safety Officer for the Response Team, Brian Hardison, described the situation,

"There are all kinds of contaminants on these refuges - some we know what they are, but I'm sure there are problems out there that we haven't even begun to identify. Until we can be sure our refuges are safe places to visit, we need to keep them closed - for public safety."

The Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Office is now up and running, fully staffed, and working on getting things back to normal. For more further information about the effects of Hurricane Rita on these refuges visit <http://www.fws.gov/southeast>

Disaster team comes here

By BONNIE STRAWSER

As residents of southern Louisiana and Texas were preparing to evacuate prior to the arrival of Hurricane Rita, the US Fish and Wildlife Service was preparing a team of trained disaster response personnel to respond to post-hurricane needs in the areas surrounding Sabine, Lacassine, and Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuges.

The USFWS Hurricane Rita Response Team was ordered to stage in Lacombe, La. on Friday, Sept. 22 so the response time would be shorter once the hurricane had passed. Since the USFWS Hurricane Katrina Response Team was functioning from Lacombe, the base camp for operations was already in place. The Rita Response Team traveled to Cameron Parish on Monday and set up the Incident Command Post at the Southland Airfield, in Carlyss.

The first order of business for the team was to assess damages and stabilize homes of the employees of Lacassine, Sabine and Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuges; and the Ecological Services and Law Enforcement Offices in La Fayette.

Incident Commander Fred Wetzel commented on the progress, "By Thursday, all employee homes had been stabilized. In most cases, roofs had to be tarped. For twelve Fish and Wildlife families, we're setting up travel

trailers for temporary housing, because their homes are just not inhabitable."

"Once USFWS employees and their families' needs had been met, our focus has shifted to evaluation of and emergency repairs to refuge facilities and emergency assistance to neighboring towns. We're team players, and we want to be good neighbors. Wherever we can legally help meet community needs, we want to provide that help." Wetzel added.

Deer, hunting seasons are closed in Cameron Parish

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries announced today additional hunting season closures and opening date postponements in parishes affected by Hurricane Rita.

LDWF Secretary Dwight Landreneau signed the Declaration of Emergency on Sept. 29 with the authority granted by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission. The details of the directive read as follows:

Because of the devastating impacts of Hurricane Rita, deer and rabbit hunting is hereby closed effective Oct. 1, 2005 in all of Cameron Parish except that portion north of

LA Highway 14, that portion of Vermilion Parish south of LA Highway 14, and that portion of Jefferson Davis Parish south of LA Highway 14, and that portion of Calcasieu Parish south of LA Highway 14 and Interstate 10. This season closure will remain in effect until more detailed surveys of the impact to these two species and their habitats can be conducted and a review of the findings is evaluated.

The first Youth Lottery Deer Hunt on Atchafalaya Delta Wildlife Management Area scheduled for Oct. 8-9, 2005 is cancelled.

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CAMERON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL Auditorium was gutted by Hurricane Rita. (Photo by Cyndi Sellers.)



CAMERON ELEMENTARY School's gym and kindergarten were destroyed. (Photo by Mike Sellers.)

School board approves parish recovery plans

Reacting to the devastation caused by Hurricane Rita to Cameron Parish Schools, the Cameron Parish School Board met in special session Monday, Oct. 3 at the Grand Lake School.

Since electric power had not been restored, the board met in the cafeteria where the large windows emitted much sunlight.

The board approved Superintendent Doug Chance's recommendations as follows:

*A school calendar will be provided to insure each Cameron parish student can complete the 2005-2006 school year in Cameron Parish.

*Restore the school year with a "schools on school site" plan which would:

*Permit the Grand Lake school to provide instructions for Grand Lake, South Cameron High, South Cameron Elementary and Cameron Elementary students.

*Permit Hackberry High School to provide instructions for Hackberry and Johnson Bayou students.

*Busing will be provided for Cameron parish students living outside the parish when

appropriate and feasible.

*Every parish school employee will continue to be employed during the school year since the school year will be completed, perhaps, on an extension of the school term into the summer months. Salary, insurance and retirement benefits would continue.

The board also adopted several actions to provide Supt. Chance authority to restore the school system to full operation as soon as possible.

The board also received a report from M. B. Slocum, insurance agent on the assessment and adjustor procedure.

The superintendent and the board expressed their appreciation to all parish officials, FEMA, State Police, National Guard and electrical crews for their efforts following the storm.

The next meeting of the School Board will be held at 10 a.m., Monday, Oct. 10 in the Grand Lake High School Cafeteria where all board meetings probably will be held until the School Board building is restored.

Precautions are given on re-entry here

There are a number of safety tips that the people who are returning to the area need to know:

There are chemical cylinders that have scattered throughout the area. Do not approach them. Stay away. If they are on your property call the sheriff or the EOC and they will take care of it for you.

Assume all water is non-potable. Do not drink the water until you are told it is O.K.

Bring plenty of mosquito repellent with you. Since the storm the mosquito population has increased significantly despite the spraying that has been happening.

Be aware of snakes and other wildlife, especially in areas where the water has not receded.

Mosquito control plans are told for the coastal areas

The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals has developed a management plan in anticipation of the hatching of mosquitoes and flies due to the massive flooding in the area. Mosquito control is needed to protect public health from nuisances and diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, as well as flies.

DHH in coordination with Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry, US Environmental Protection Agencies, Department of Defense and in consultation with parish mosquito control districts is implementing a plan to reduce mosquitoes and flies in the areas affected by Hurricane Rita.

Aerial application of routinely used pesticides, primarily Naled, in Cameron parish on Sunday, Oct. 2 and will continue in Beauregard parish in the next few days. The spraying will occur during the last 2-3 hours of daylight. The US Air Force will

conduct the aerial applications to assist mosquito control activities normally conducted by parish and local mosquito control districts.

The spraying will use the same pesticides as routinely sprayed to control mosquitoes in the south Louisiana region. "The timely initiation of preventive measures to control mosquitoes and flies is necessary to reduce the risk of vector-borne diseases" said Dr. Cerise.

Naled is a pesticide routinely used by mosquito control districts in Louisiana. Naled is approved by US Environmental Protection Agency and will be applied according to that agency's application rates. Studies have shown that Naled does not impact on human health or the environment when used for mosquito control.

The plan will continue based on field monitoring of mosquitoes and flies in the region.

For more information call the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry's pesticide hotline at 225-925-3763.

Alligator season extended due to recent hurricane

The Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) has signed a declaration of emergency under the authority of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission that will extend the 2005 alligator season until Oct. 30 due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

This extension is an effort to help the many alligator hunters in the hurricane damaged areas who have been displaced and have had alligator harvest efforts delayed. Hunters are reminded to coordinate their harvest activity with their local alligator buyers or processors as they may have been affected by the hurricanes as well.

Anyone wishing to have an alligator removed from private property, can call 373-0032 for assistance. The New Iberia Fur and Refuge Division office will dispatch personnel to relocate nuisance alligators that may have been displaced by storm activity.

The damage caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita has severely impacted millions of people and hundreds of thousands of acres of coastal marshes. Alligator populations in affected areas have been displaced and suffered some degree of direct mortality. LDWF assessments of these impacts are still ongoing.

Also as a reminder, LDWF will allow hunters who lost their alligator tags and licenses due to the impacts of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita to reapply in writing to LDWF for replacement tags and licenses.

If you are allergic to mold, be cautious upon entering your premises. Consider wearing a particle mask.

There is a large amount of debris and nails in the area. If you cannot remember when the last time you had a tetanus shot or it has been more than five years since your last one, get a tetanus shot before coming into the area.

For other health and safety tips go to the Center for Disease Control's Hurricanes Health and Safety Web Page at www.bt.cdc.gov/hurricanes/index.asp

DO NOT MIX CHLORINE AND AMMONIA TOGETHER WHEN CLEANING. Stay safe, Cameron Parish is on its way to recovery.

Hackberry storm relief efforts are described

By BONNIE STRAWSER

Parish officials in Hackberry are wondering if the world even knows their town exists. Located adjacent to Sabine National Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Louisiana, Hackberry is home to eight US Fish and Wildlife Service families. Not only are the homes of these employees severely damaged, but most homes in Hackberry have suffered what is likely irreparable damage from Hurricane Rita. Most residents have yet to see what is left of their homes, since, until yesterday, this area has been opened only to emergency workers since the storm.

The Cameron Parish Office of Emergency Preparedness, which was set up at the Hackberry Community Center, offered drinking water, food, ice, and fuel for emergency workers and residents; however, the site itself was without power a week after Rita has passed.

Tracy Webb, Assistant Head of Emergency Preparedness for the Hackberry side of Cameron Parish, offered assistance to Fish and Wildlife efforts from his meager storehouse of resources.

"I know there are a lot bigger places that have a lot more people who are without resources," Webb commented, "but Hackberry folks have nothing - I don't think there's a home left that's inhabitable, and now residents are all going to be coming back to find their individual disasters at each of their homes. We're doing all we can right now, and all we can really do is pass on the messages we're getting from everyone else - 'just try to be patient'. But, I know it's hard to be patient when you're wearing the same clothes you were wearing when Rita hit, and you've not had a shower during that time, as well. Throw in the heat and humidity. We really need some help in Hackberry."

Webb added, "Hackberry isn't the only town here in this condition. Holly Beach doesn't even have a stick left where all the homes were,

and Johnson Bayou has been wiped out, too. But, it's been amazing to watch the unsung heroes in these towns - the firemen, law enforcement, and others who have put their own family needs aside and worked round-the-clock for days, trying to provide for their neighbors with few or no resources."

The US Fish and Wildlife Service Rita Response Team committed personnel and equipment to clear access for emergency vehicles in Hackberry. Parish officials are hopeful that assistance from other agencies will soon be available to Hackberry and other southern Louisiana towns that are small and off-the-beaten path, but no less devastated than the larger, more visible cities and towns.

GAS SAVING TIPS

Here's some time-tested advice from the experts at the group that tests and certifies automotive technicians-the nonprofit National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE).

Their plan of action involves keeping your vehicle properly maintained and changing your driving habits.

- Monitor your tires. Under-inflated tires or poorly aligned wheels waste fuel by forcing the engine to work harder. Let the tires cool down before checking the air pressure. Out-of-line wheels, as evidenced by uneven tread wear, should be aligned by a professional.

- Consolidate your daily trips and errands. Also, try to travel when traffic is light so you can avoid stop-and-go conditions.

- Avoid excessive engine idling. Shut off your vehicle while waiting for friends and family.

- Observe speed limits. Speeding decreases your SUV's mileage.

- Drive gently. Sudden accelerations guzzle gas. Anticipate traffic patterns ahead and adjust your speed gradually. Use cruise control.

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GENERAL RUSSEL HONORE, commanding National Guard and active duty military response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, arrived in Cameron Parish on Monday, Sept. 26 to view the damage. (Photo by Mike Sellers.)



HURRICANE RITA'S namesake seems to feel right at home with the USFWS Rita Response Team in Carlyss. Adopted mom to "Rita" is Jane Pedrotti, a US Forest Service team member from South Dakota who has worked both Katrina and Rita Response Teams. (Photo courtesy of USFWS, Bonnie Strawser.)



NATHAN SANDIFER, joined the USFWS Hurricane Rita Response Team as a temporary 'administratively determined' position. Sandifer worked well with the team received high praise for his solid work ethic and team player attitude. (Photo courtesy of Bonnie Strawser, USFWS.)

Coping with stress caused by hurricanes or other disasters

You probably can't avoid the stress coming in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, but there are ways you can try to manage its effects, according to LSU AgCenter family and child development specialist Dr. Becky White.

"Losing homes, family members, friends and jobs certainly are some of the causes of stress for many people these days," White said, adding, "Millions of people are displaced and need to find ways to cope with stress. Whether they're in hotels, shelters or living with friends, it's a difficult time."

In addition to the major losses suffered by people across the hurricane-ravaged area of the Gulf Coast, others also have sources of stress.

"There are lines for gas and higher gas prices in a lot of areas," the LSU AgCenter expert explained. "Things like that are affecting everyone."

Among the other factors affecting even those who escaped the storm are traffic congestion, shortages of a variety of groceries and supplies, longer waiting lines in restaurants, cancellation of events scheduled for facilities now serving as shelters and much more.

"No one is escaping the stress," White said.

To manage these stressful times as best you can, White offers these tips from colleagues across the country:

- * Be very patient.

- * Establish what's really important, but consider that everyone's point of view on what is top priority may be different from yours.

- * Don't expect things to return to normal immediately. Accept that changes in your life, both physically and emotionally, will be here for a while.

- * Recognize that hurricane victims have suffered losses and that it's normal for them to express disbelief, anxiety, anger, sadness and depression afterward.

- * Understand that the emotions of hurricane victims can swing dramatically, and moods could change without warning.

- * Don't fail to notice your children's feelings. They need to feel they can rely on you for the extra love, attention and support necessary to get through this disaster. Comfort them, making sure they realize they are not responsible for the problems you face.

- * Keep your family diet as nourishing as possible.

- * To build a sense of capability, focus on the big picture rather than little details and problems.

- * Talk with family, friends and clergy. A compassionate network is essential to your recovery.

- * Resist the temptation to revert to personal bad habits while under stress.

(Portions of this material

Cockatiel becomes mascot at command post in H'berry

By **BONNIE STRAWSER**

Hurricane Rita turned to veer toward Sabine National Wildlife Refuge in southern Louisiana with very little advanced notice of its strength or actual landfall site. Families of refuge employees, like their neighbors, rushed to gather their most precious possessions and move them out of the area or secure them as well as possible to endure the storm wherever they were.

In many cases, evacuating families was the best that could be done. Many precious things had to be left behind. One such jewel was rescued on Tuesday by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service emergency response team. During a reconnaissance mission to assess damage to employee homes, workers discovered a very quiet, but safe and healthy cockatiel. The small parrot-like bird was evacuated, affectionately named 'Rita', and quickly became the mascot of the Incident Command Post.

Howard McCullough, leader for Bravo Division, who rescued the bird described the situation, "It was obvious someone cared for the bird. It was left with plenty of food and water, and the cage was wrapped to keep it as safe as possible. We knew the family who owned it

were adapted from the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service's Disaster Resources written by Dr. Wayne Matthews.)

would be relieved to hear we had it, and it was safe."

Back at camp, Rita became 'Miss Congenialty'. Team members congregated at her cage to chat quietly with the bird, feed her a bit of apple, or just offer her a finger to nuzzle.

Incident Commander, Fred Wetzel, said Rita was a great addition to the Command Post. "Anything that sounds or looks like home makes the place better for the team members. These folks work and live in some of the worst circumstances - often just functioning on adrenaline.

Something like Rita helps relieve a little stress and reminds us why we're here. We're here to help our people; we know that our people are our most valuable resource."

Jane Pedrotti, a purchasing officer from the US Forest Service in South Dakota who joined the Rita Response Team, quickly became Rita's 'adopted mom'. Signs above her cage stated 'Do NOT feed me avacados, apple seeds or chocolate!' Pedrotti commented, "Rita must be tough to have survived this storm in a house that was destroyed. But, overall, these birds are pretty sensitive. It's important that we keep her healthy until she can be reunited with her family."

In the meantime, like others in the US Fish and Wildlife Service Rita Response Team, Rita gets her 'bird bath' each morning. But, somehow, we don't think she shares their hopes for a hot shower!

FEMA gives assistance

The Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency continues to provide assistance in the aftermath of Hurricane Rita. Federal resources and commodities continue to flow into Louisiana and Texas.

Update on FEMA response activities for Hurricane Rita:

- FEMA has over 500 medical personnel in Beaumont, Livingston, Port Arthur, Nacogdoches, Woodville, and Orange, Texas; as well as Lake Charles and Alexandria. Almost 2,000 patients in Texas and Louisiana have been treat-

ed.

- Voluntary agencies and the state of Texas opened 353 shelters that housed 108,047.

Low-interest disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) also are available for residential and business losses not covered by insurance.

- FEMA is making Expedited Assistance in the amount of \$2,000 available per eligible household in the Louisiana parishes of: Cameron, Calcasieu, Beauregard, Vermilion and Jefferson Davis; and in the Texas counties of: Chambers,

Galveston, Hardin, Jasper,

Jefferson, Liberty, Newton,

Orange and Tyler. This assistance will be allocated for transportation, food, clothing, rental housing or other housing accommodations while these residents are displaced from their homes.

- USDA is working closely with Texas and Louisiana officials to assess and investigate Hurricane Rita's impact on livestock. As the Hurricane Rita affected areas along the gulf coast become accessible, USDA will begin assistance through the Emergency Watershed Protection program as needed.

Richard was unable to work with the team, but offered to help find someone else. Thirty minutes later, he walked in with Nathan Sandifer from Sulphur.

Sandifer was hired in a temporary "administratively determined" position to provide camp support for the team. Strawser added, "And, he became one of the team just like everybody else. He ran errands, replenished ice

supplies, hauled materials and supplies, put together generators, built screen doors, and did whatever else we needed. He did it with a smile on his face and an attitude of helpfulness and appreciation for being there."

Bonnie Strawser, Information Officer for the Response Team, described her first conversation with Sandifer, "I walked over to meet Nathan and asked how his house had held up. He said he didn't have a house anymore - that he and his family were living in a travel trailer with his grandparents, who had also lost their home. Here he was helping us help our employees when he had lost everything himself. But, that's the kind of reaction we've seen everywhere in Cameron and Calcasieu Parishes - people reach beyond their own needs to help others. They're all good neighbors."

"I think Nathan might have 'discovered his calling' while on this temporary assignment," Strawser continued. "I wouldn't be surprised if we didn't see Nathan as an employee on a national wildlife refuge one day - he's certainly made of the right stuff."

Fred Wetzel, Incident Commander for the Response Team, was also impressed with the young man. "I told him we'd be happy to give his name to contractors and other companies who will be accomplishing some of the needed repair and construction work on these refuges. Anyone looking for a good hand would be glad to have Nathan around."

Wetzel praised Sandifer's work ethic and attitude. "These Incident Command Teams work under the worst of conditions. We often have to make do with less than needed equipment, supplies and materials and just have to do the best we can with what we have. Nathan has been a great team player and a hard worker. With that combination, I'm sure he'll go far."



THE SUBWAY restaurant on Cameron's main street was actually in better condition than most businesses, though completely gutted. (Photo by Mike Sellers.)



JAMES DAIGLE stands where his front porch door used to be... Grand Chenier. (Photo courtesy of William Daigle.)



IN HACKBERRY, most of the homes have been severely damaged or destroyed. The USFWS Hurricane Rita Response Team is providing emergency assistance to its employees, including setting up travel trailers to allow them to live on their property until these houses can be repaired or rebuilt. The team also provided emergency assistance for clearing roads and driveways of other affected citizens, as requested by the local Office of Emergency Preparedness. (Photo courtesy of USFWS, Fred Wetzel.)