



THE STAFFORD NEWSLETTER



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Stafford Weathers Storm; Proves Up to the Test

HURRICANE IKE DAMAGES, STRESSES CITY

It had been 25 years since Hurricane Alicia had pounded the Gulf Coast. With hurricane warnings being issued for our area each storm season, we knew it was simply a matter of time before we were hit. The only questions: when and how hard would it be?

The answer came in the early morning hours of Saturday, September 13, when slashing rains and winds averaging 65 mph, and gusting to near 100 mph, battered Stafford.

City forces were well prepared. Starting the vigilance on the prior Monday, police officers, firefighters and municipal personnel began full staging efforts. Two days later when it was apparent we'd be hit, Mayor Leonard Scarcella issued a Declaration of Disaster, triggering placing the City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) into a full readiness status. Director of Emergency Services, Police Chief Bonny Krahn, ordered around-the-clock surveillance and preparation. Friday night, on the eve of landfall, all personnel were in place.

Most residents were also bracing for impact and had taken necessary precautions. But there were those who did not have adequate accommodations to ride out the turbulence, and by State mandate we were not in an evacuation zone. So, Stafford did something that no other city in the area did. Mayor Scarcella ordered activation of a refuge center for those needy residents. Managed by Directors Gene Bane and Susan Ricks, this provided a safe haven, first at

the school and ultimately at the Stafford Centre, for almost 250 most appreciative people, who also were fed before returning to their homes when the danger had passed.

As the howling winds and blowing rains began to subside on Saturday morning, it was now time for the grueling, somewhat lengthy, and often stressful task of dealing with the aftermath. Damaged homes and businesses, universal power outages, downed trees, broken utility poles and lines, devastated commercial signs and shattered glass were all strewn about. First responders hit the streets to assess and take the initial steps in the restorations. The citizens began the daunting task, before darkness set in, of dealing with the most pressing emergencies. This is where the true mettle of City forces, and all Staffordians, would be put to a stern test. Just as with the preparations, the City and its citizens clearly distinguished themselves.

Many episodes about Stafford's response to Hurricane Ike will long be related. It is only fitting that some be told in this newsletter.



Debris cleanup major task in Hurricane IKE restoration

NEW ZONING ORDINANCE PASSED

After more than a year of discussion and sometimes spirited debate, City Council voted 6 to 0 to adopt a new zoning ordinance creating a district for the Island (IS) and a district for the Primary Corridor (PC) for the areas on each side of Murphy Road and along US 90A. The most prominent of the newly adopted regulations addresses building designs and standards, site plans, parking, landscaping, outdoor sales and displays and signage within the IS and PC districts. These regulations will affect new development within these two areas. Existing nonconforming site improvements uses are still under consideration and have resulted in a contentious debate.

The process in approving the ordinance was not only lengthy but involved numerous steps. Initially approved for funding by the Board of the Stafford Economic Development Corporation (SEDC), a consultant, Kendig Keast Collaborative, and the Greater Fort Bend Economic Development Council were retained to work with the City. Initial proposals by the consultant unveiled at the Town Hall Meeting this past January created confusion and significant resistance. The most controversial aspects related to requiring properties with existing nonconforming facilities to revitalize within 1, 2, or 3 years.

Following recommendations by a staff committee, and later an ad hoc committee, the proposed ordinance was submitted to the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) and the SEDC meeting jointly to make refinements. After almost weekly meetings spanning four months, which included comments from the public at each, it was decided to split the ordinance into two parts: the base document for new development in the created IS and PC zones, and what had evolved to be referred to as the 3-6-9 portion, which related to the existing nonconforming site uses. Based on a recommendation by Mayor Leonard Scarcella, the requirements as

to those nonconforming sites for revitalization were extended from 1, 2, and 3 years to 3, 6, and 9 years with a right of a Specific Use Permit (SUP) for property owners who believed they could not comply.

At a public hearing in September, mostly opponents to the ordinance and especially the 3-6-9 provisions urged defeat of the ordinance. Proponents, few in number, asked for adoption of the total package.

Last month, after a healthy debate, P&Z recommended by a vote of 6 to 1 that City Council adopt the base ordinance with the 3-6-9 and SUP provisions. The next evening, City Council approved the base ordinance but called for a committee to further study the 3-6-9 provisions.

At the time this article goes to press, Council has agreed to have workshops on the 3-6-9 provisions and to bring in an ad hoc committee of seven citizens to participate with Council on an ordinance addressing the details of those nonconforming site improvement uses. It is anticipated that the initial meeting of Council and the ad hoc committee will convene in January.

Authorized New Architectural Designs



Oriel Window



Canopy



Balcony



Awning

Calendar:
December 1 - Tree Limb Pick Up
December 4 - Holiday Tree Lighting
Offices Closed:
November 27-28 - Thanksgiving
December 25-26 - Christmas
January 1 - New Year's Day

Over 150,000 People from Four Counties Served

STAFFORD POD COMES TO THE RESCUE

When preparations for Hurricane Ike commenced, a point of distribution (POD) in the City to dispense water, ice and meals (MRE's) to those in need was not on the radar screen. Two weeks later, Stafford was receiving accolades from across the region for providing one of the most effective POD's during the storm's recovery operations.

Word from State officials of the need for distribution centers throughout the affected area began on Monday, as recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast intensified. Several POD's were established around Houston, including one here near the Stafford Centre.

Jennifer Taylor, newly appointed Emergency Management Coordinator, who had just come on board with the City a week before, began working out arrangements with FEMA for delivery of these basic necessities. Late that evening, 80,000 pounds of ice rolled into Stafford on two 18-wheelers courtesy of FEMA. The big question: how does one store and distribute not only ice, but water and food to those in desperate need?



Mayor assesses POD operations with the Johnston's

Fortunately, Stafford had good Samaritans named Mike and Sharon Johnston, owners of the Southern Ice Cream Corporation on Greenland Drive, who offered not only their huge frozen lockers, but their entire crew and specialized equipment.

At 10 a.m. on Tuesday, the Stafford POD opened, staffed with personnel from the City as well as volunteers from Stafford and throughout the community. By the end of the day, ice, water and MRE's were

being hauled in and handed out in abundance to needy people, most of who were without power. Just for good measure, the Johnston's made available, free, thousands of ice cream bars to those coming in droves.

What gained the Stafford POD such acclaim was that, while one by one the other POD's across the region shut down, for the final three days only our POD remained open. Over the ten days of operation, this POD served over 150,000 people from Fort Bend, Harris, Galveston and Brazoria Counties.

Cars lined up for water, ice and food for 10 days at POD



Additionally many needs were met that were never anticipated for the POD. It provided food and water to a local construction company for its more than 60 employees working with the recovery effort in Galveston. A Sugar Land resident, who was seriously concerned for her neighbor on life support and whose health was deteriorating, came in desperation to look for help to get electricity restored to the patient's home. CenterPoint was contacted from the POD, and power was restored within two hours!

When finally preparing to close, the Stafford POD assisted more than 14 churches in four counties with stocking water and MRE's so they could assist their communities after our POD was shut down.

A special thanks goes to Jennifer Taylor, Susan Ricks, City police, firefighters and other first responders and the many volunteers from across the area, particularly Mr. and Mrs. Johnston, for answering the call of so many who had no where else to turn.



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Near Ike Tragedy Avoided; Man Severely Injured by Falling Tree

CITY'S ARMORED CAR, CREW SAVE MAN'S LIFE

On Friday, September 12, as the City of Stafford and surrounding areas prepared for the arrival of Hurricane Ike, the Fort Bend EOC asked if any city had a vehicle capable of operating in winds greater than 50 mph for response to extreme, life threatening trauma patients - given that normal fire, EMS and police operations cease when winds achieve 50 mph. The Stafford EOC replied that Stafford had a SWAT armored car – an Alternative Response Vehicle (ARV) – that was capable due to its weight and sturdiness and available if needed.

The crew to staff the ARV consisted of Stafford Fire Department Lt. Michael Fleming and Firefighter Pete Ramirez and Fort Bend EMS Paramedic Chris LaCourse. After preparatory briefing, personnel readied the ARV for a mission never envisioned when the car was originally built. Using fire department equipment and ingenuity, the ARV was converted into a vehicle able to transport non-ambulatory trauma patients and provide Advanced Life Support care. It was ready in less than three hours.

At 1 a.m. on Saturday, fire, EMS and police operations were suspended due to the extremely hazardous weather conditions. As fate would have it, less than 15 minutes later, the ARV was summoned to rescue a critically

injured man trapped unconscious under a fallen tree in Sienna Plantation.

The “green light” was given and the crew of the ARV loaded up and headed into the near 70 mph winds. Following the 11-mile, 40-minute journey to the scene, the patient was extricated from underneath the fallen tree and placed into the ARV. A rendezvous with a Medic Unit had to be abandoned, so the ARV headed for the nearest hospital. As the ARV approached the hospital, the crew was notified that a power failure had forced its closure. With continued heavy rain and winds buffeting the ARV, the crew rerouted to Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital passing over the treacherous Brazos River bridge and arrived safely in the nick of time to save the patient. Hospital ER personnel were surprised as the navy blue armored car, with the patient, entered the emergency loading area.

After transferring the patient, the ARV headed home through the hurricane-force winds and rain.

As a result of the efforts of the Stafford Fire and Police Departments, Fort Bend County EMS, and the use of a quite unique vehicle, a certain fatality was averted.

Although severely injured, the patient continues to improve.