

Life has been full of ups and downs since Katrina hit

By GREG UNDERWOOD
Special to the Dixie Drawl

According to my insurance adjuster, the damage to my unlivable house is at \$80,000 and climbing. It's been 70 days since I first talked with my contractor and no work has been started, much less an estimate been furnished.

My wife, child and I have called four places home since the hurricane. My daughter missed her first birthday party.

Of the only two offices that suffered damage at the Forrest County Center, mine had the most, and while I've had to throw away some books, the flooded carpet still remains (and it took in more during Hurricane Rita).

My insurance company hasn't paid me anything for personal property damages. Yesterday, the Red Cross denied my application for aid. Moreover, as I write this on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, I've been stood up by a second contractor, discovered I have been robbed, and seen Tennessee lose to Vandy for the first time in most of my students' lives. All is not well.

Yet, I have a lot to be thankful for, and when people ask me how I'm doing, I answer—in all sincerity—“I'm doing fine.”

In the days of Katrina's immediate aftermath, while my wife Leigh Ann and daughter Jill Ellen and I were staying at my parents in Memphis, we were trying to make sense of our situation. At this point, we were already aware of our home's poor condition thanks to Hattiesburg friends (including fellow PRCC instructor Eric Leatherwood).

Largely to ease my wife's anxiety, but without realizing the prophetic truth of what I was about to say, I mentioned to her that even though we really did not know what the future held for us, I was pretty sure that we would be shown untold amounts of kindness by family, friends, co-workers, and even total strangers.

We rode out the storm in Forest, with the parents of our friends Terry and Susan Miller, and their daughter Taylor. After learning of our house's damage, we went to Memphis, and later moved in with our same friends, at their firm insistence, for the month of September until our apartment (one we were fortunate to find) became available in October.

While living with the Millers, we were treated like royalty, our daughter had her birthday party, and she loved having an older sister she could follow around the house. Their kindness made a difficult situation enjoyable and even welcome.

At the Forrest County Center, Dr. (Cecil) Burt and Susan Donohue have been extremely gracious in covering my schedule for me for my various meetings with contractors, movers, and FEMA officials. I could not

have asked more of either.

Our life since the hurricane has been made considerably easier by having an insurance policy that included additional living expenses, which is paying for our apartment, utilities, and even the move itself (I heartily recommend the “boys” of Hattiesburg ice purveyor Nick Kolinsky, owner of Nick's Ice House, for all your moving needs!).

I also understand my contractor, who is both local and reputable, is a bit overwhelmed, and will need some time.

Thankfully, I'm not in a position where I need a rushed job. Additionally, I was able to get major tree work (the kind for which cranes are needed) performed and directly paid for from my insurance company's assistance center set up at a local home improvement store.

My brothers and sisters made us a rather quick donation to help with our immediate expenses.

Within days, friends and family volunteered to drive up to 6 hours and come to Hattiesburg to help cut, clean and pack.

I arrived at my house the Saturday after Katrina to see friends, family, and others I did not even know all ready to help. The next day, back in Memphis, high school friends with whom I still have annual golf trips arranged to give my family a sizable and much unexpected donation.

A week later, an envelope from one of my wife's friends arrived containing a similar gift, made up of contributions from her Auburn University sorority sisters.

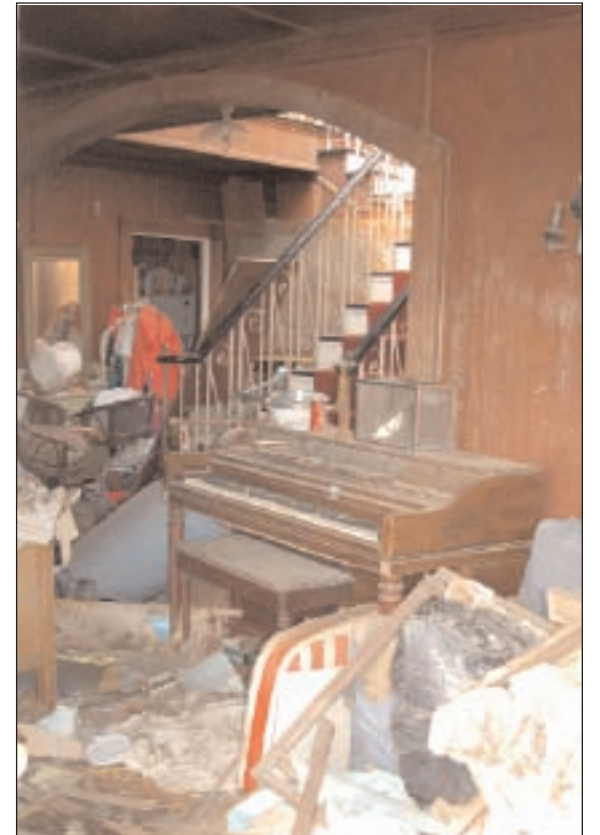
While checking my email, I opened what I initially assumed to be a fictional message, one informing me that the Internet bank in which I had only opened an account three months previously was donating \$1000 to all of its account holders in Katrina affected areas.

I called to verify the information, and to my surprise, it was true (the bank is www.emigrantdirect.com). It was more money than I had in the account itself. While the Red Cross assistance would have been appreciated, I'll be fine without it. There are other, more deserving folks who can put it to better use than I can.

So, life really is going pretty well. My wife and I have our family and our health; we consider ourselves blessed and we thank God for those blessings. The personal property check is in the mail; the thieves who robbed me cut the locks on my shed and took only 10 gallons of leftover gasoline (unexplainably leaving the gasoline cans and lawn mowing equipment); and the Wildcats have won their third straight football state championship.

Life could be much, much worse.

■ Greg Underwood is an English Instructor at the Forrest County Center in Hattiesburg.



Hancock County devastation must be seen in person to believe

By CHUCK ABADIE
Special to Dixie Drawl

BAY ST. LOUIS - Three times I have visited Hancock County and three times I have come away with the same thought: You really have to visit the Mississippi Gulf Coast to see it, to comprehend the level of devastation.

Photographs on the news, even the photographs you see on this page, and the news reports you see on television, in the newspapers and hear discussed on the radio on a daily basis don't fully describe what Hurricane Katrina did back on Aug. 29, 2005.

The people in Hancock County don't really want to hear about this rebuilding plan or that rebuilding plan for Bay St. Louis or Waveland. Those folks are still in recovery mode.

Yes, there is some progress. The automobiles that were strewn in the ditches of the main roadways, turned upside down, smashed by trees are gone for the most part, if you want to call that progress, here nearly three months removed from the storm.

Downtown Bay St. Louis is no more. Katrina wiped out restaurants, shops, churches and roads. Yes, roads. It's not easy navigating Beach Boulevard. For one thing, it's no longer a Boulevard.

The portion of the roadway on the side of the Gulf Coast is gone.

Just getting to Beach Boulevard takes some doing. One has to dodge sink holes, debris on both sides of the road, cleanup trucks, refrigerators, washing machines, worn couches, kids' rusting toys, water-soaked stuff animals, and ... Well, I don't know if I am painting an accurate picture or not.

The few houses left standing appear uninhabitable. The front doors are missing. One home had a sign

on the door that read, “Take what you want ... at your own risk.” Inside, you could see dishes on the floor, clothes strewn throughout, and an occasional torn photograph.

There are more FEMA trailers visible now. Some are hooked up for water, sewer and power, and some are not. Some have Christmas lights dangling every which way.

Very few lots have been cleared. Very few streets have been cleared. Mountains of debris turn roads into one-way passages.

Bottom line is Hancock County doesn't look much different from when I visited two weeks after the storm. Know how I can tell?

There are ERVs here still feeding people. I know ERVs. ERV stands for Emergency Response Vehicles, which are built to Red Cross specifications and used to transport hot food to places which have little or no food or clean water.

My wife, 12-year-old daughter and I did volunteer work for the Red Cross in ERVs for a week or so right after the storm. We fed folks in Prentiss, Bassfield, Richton, Sumrall, Columbia and Hattiesburg. That program ended in September in the greater Hattiesburg area. This is December.

I read the other day where another portion of U.S. 90 was opening in Gulfport. Great news for those folks.

In Hancock County, no work is being done on Beach Boulevard, where huge mounds of debris have replaced historic homes and popular landmarks as you look north from the Gulf. It's easy to get lost because of no landmarks. People are still living in tents on their slabs. Homeowners are still sifting through belongings.

Those huge oak trees that survived along Beach Boulevard have an eerie look about them. Socks and shirts dangle from their limbs. I

stop to turn around in the road because a slow-moving tractor creeps along ahead of me, maybe 5 miles-per-hour. It's just as well.

The longer you drive the more it looks the same.

Some schools are open, but I am told the number of students is maybe one-fourth to one-third of what it was pre-Katrina. Across the street from one school is a row of houses that look okay from the outside, until you look closer and see that the insides have either been gutted or stand as nothing more than abandoned structures.

Up the road, I watch a truck picking up debris. Upon closer examination, it appears the operator is doing nothing more than moving the pile from one place to another.

There are painted signs that speak louder than words. There's one that says, “We plan to rebuild.” Two doors, or make that two structures down, another sign reads, “Will shoot looters dead.”

You want more. “Yes, this is Third World,” read another.

The inside of the Wal-Mart on U.S. 90 looks like a Sam's Club on the inside. The walls are nothing but plywood. I stopped to look at a big stack of mattresses near the front door. A worker tells me they are for the FEMA trailers.

On U.S. 90, the sign above PRCC's Hancock Center is still there. The center itself is pretty much gutted now. Some molded sheetrock remains, all the metal studs are visible now. It's nothing more than a shell of a building.

Pearl River Community College is not going anywhere. We will continue to serve the educational needs of Hancock County, whether its in portable classrooms or back in the center when it is complete.

■ Chuck Abadie is Director of Public Relations at PRCC.



Hancock County devastation

Cleanup and repair work in Hancock County has been going slower than other places hit by Hurricane Katrina. These photos were taken Dec. 6 in Bay St. Louis. In the top photo, work still has not begun on the bridge from Bay St. Louis to Henderson Point in Harrison County.

Photos by Pamela Luke

HEALTHWATCH: Sore throats a problem this time of year

By SUSIE HALL, R.N.
PRCC Nurse

Many students come into health services complaining of a sore throat. Sore or scratchy throats are one of the most common signs of “getting” sick.

There are many things that can cause your throat to hurt.

Viral infections/colds, smoking, breathing polluted air, drinking alcohol, hay fever/allergies, and bacterial infections are common causes. Most sore throats caused by viral infections such as colds will usually go away in a few days without any type of treatment.

Tonsillitis (swelling of the tonsils) and strep throat often present the same symptoms, although strep symptoms are usually more severe. They include:

- Sore throat or difficulty swallowing
- Fever
- Headache
- Stomach ache or vomiting, especially in young children
- Swollen, red tonsils, sometimes with white streaks or patches

■ Swollen, tender lymph glands in the neck

You may have these symptoms without having strep throat, and it is possible to have strep without these symptoms.

Strep throat is caused by the bacteria Streptococcus pyogenes and is highly contagious. Strep and viral infections (the cold or flu included) can spread through droplets in the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes and also by touching objects that have been contaminated such as utensils and bathroom objects, cell phones, doorknobs, etc. and then touching your mouth or nose.

You should wash your hands frequently, avoid touching your mouth and nose, and cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue to prevent catching or passing the virus or bacteria that can lead to a sore throat.

While Strep is easily treated with antibiotics, you should never take an antibiotic for a sore throat caused by viral infections, the cold, or the flu.

Antibiotics should be taken until they are finished even if you are feeling better to prevent antibiotic-resistant strains from developing. If strep throat is left

untreated, it can sometimes develop in rheumatic fever and damage the valves of the heart.

Strep throat most commonly occurs during late fall, winter and early spring with the highest number of cases occurring in the fall and spring. Viral infections tend to peak during the winter months.

OTC medications

You can help ease the pain of a sore throat by taking OTC medicines such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil), or naproxen (Aleve), gargling with warm salt water (1 teaspoon table salt in a glass of warm water), sucking on throat lozenges, hard candy, or popsicles, using a humidifier, and drinking lots of fluids.

You should see your doctor if you have:

- A sore throat without a cold or runny nose or that lasts longer than 48 hours.
- A sore throat with tender, swollen lymph glands.
- A fever higher than 102 in older children or any fever lasting longer than 48 hours.
- Rash, severe headache, joint pain
- Difficulty breathing, difficulty swallowing, includ-

ing saliva

The PRCC Health Services Clinic has over-the-counter medications available, which include acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and naproxen.

We also provide free Nicotine Replacement Therapy such as nicotine patches, gum, and lozenges for current students enrolled in the College Tobacco Quit Program.

For more information, please stop by the Health Services Clinic in Crosby Hall or call ext. 1303.

Clinic services are available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m. and are free to all PRCC students, faculty, and staff presenting valid PRCC ID cards.

Remember flu shots

Don't forget your flu shots. Flu shots are still available at the Poplarville Family Clinic (795-4969) on Highway 11, approximately one mile south of the college. You do not have to have an appointment.

Also, you may contact your local health departments to find out the days and times they are administering the flu vaccine.