

H U R R I C A N E K A T R I N A

Katrina's path of fury

How it all began

Hurricane Katrina left many homes destroyed and many lives changed as it blew through Louisiana and southeast Mississippi.

Sunday, August 28:

Refugees from the Gulf Coast and New Orleans start to arrive in Hattiesburg.

Monday, Aug. 29

About 7 a.m. Northern part of the eyewall comes ashore at Grand Isle, La., moving northeast at 15 mph.

11 a.m. Katrina's center is at the mouth of the Pearl River at the Louisiana-Mississippi border with winds of 125 mph.

About 11:30 a.m. eye wall hits Hattiesburg with 100 mph winds

The city loses power, water, cable, and natural gas services. Thousands of trees are toppled in the Pine Belt, many damaging homes.

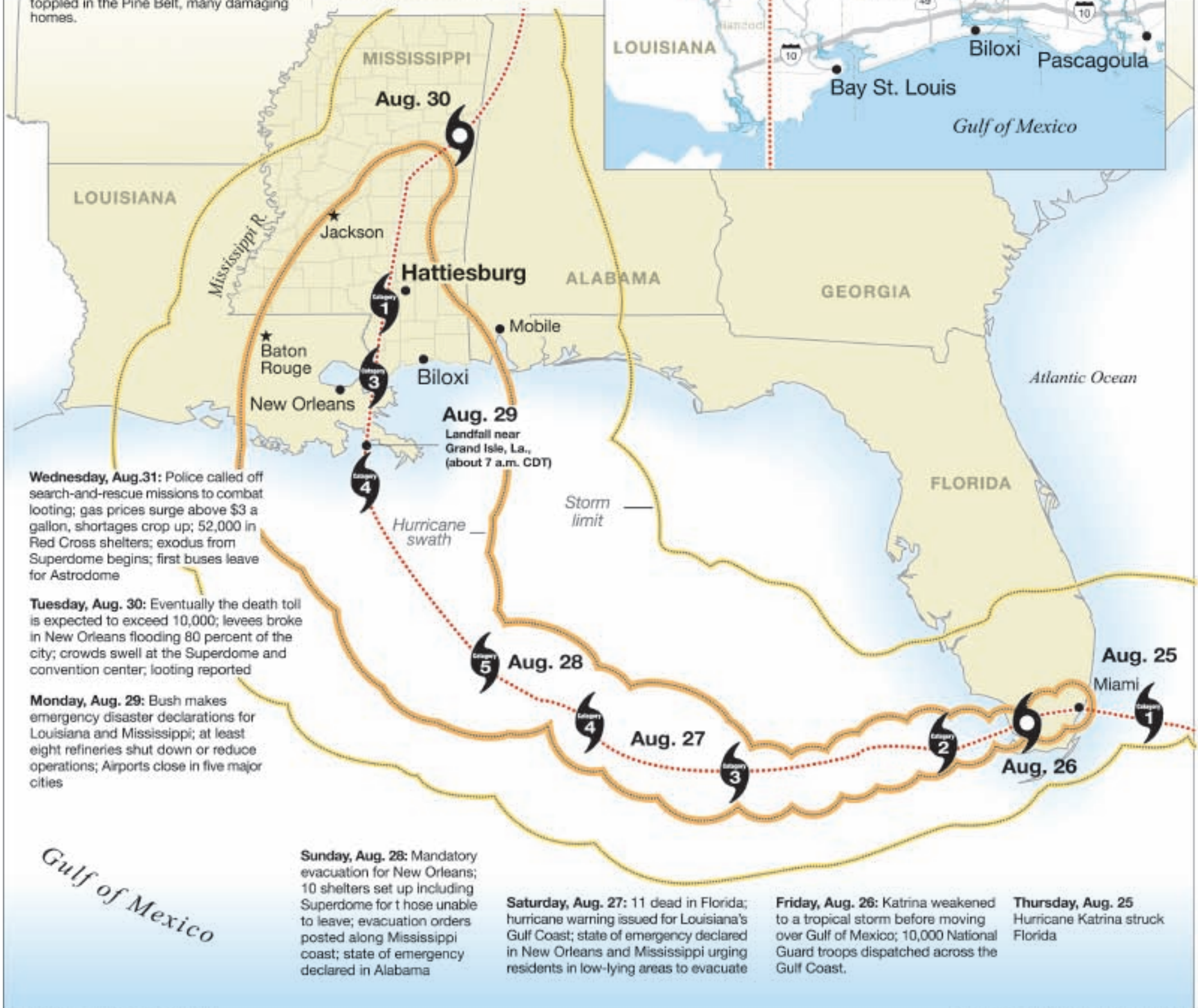
All 195,000 customers of Mississippi Power lose electricity. The company has 5,000 poles on the ground. Most rural electric companies suffer a similar fate.

Monday, Aug. 29

Red Cross opens shelter at the Forrest County multi purpose center in Hattiesburg. Eventually 1,800 use the facility.

A dusk-to-dawn curfew is imposed in Hattiesburg, Petal and Forrest County.

A boil-water order is issued. Gas is rationed at the few stations that still have supplies. Virtually all commerce stops.



SOURCES: AP research; FEMA; Red Cross; GNS

Dennis Lowe, FLORIDA TODAY / GNS Gulf Coast map

Volunteering with Red Cross ERV program satisfying experience

By **CHUCK ABADIE**
Dixie Drawl advisor

When my wife first mentioned the idea of our family doing volunteer work for the American Red Cross two days after Hurricane Katrina came through, we had no power at our home, no water, no communications, and a bunch of refrigerated food going bad in a hurry.

The yard was a mess, the roof leaked, pine trees lay sprawled across my backyard.

Going to work was out of the question. No gas in my truck.

My days consisted of yard work and hauling 5-gallon buckets of water from our neighbor's swimming pool to the bathroom every time somebody had to go. My 12-year-old daughter Catherine was having Internet/email withdrawal symptoms.

Who's going to help us, I thought.

Well, after working several days as an LDV on an ERV, and traveling to some of the small towns around the Pine Belt, I didn't feel so bad about my situation.

I felt good about what my family and I were doing, particularly about what one area of the American Red Cross does in relief efforts, and I felt bad for a lot of people in South Mississippi. Let me explain.

LDV stands for Local Disaster Volunteers, something the Red Cross could use more of. 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.

In our first meeting at Main Street Baptist Church three days after the storm, a room full of people were glad to see us. Why? Not because we were volunteers, but we were local. People were there from California, Washington state, Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, Maryland, North Carolina, even Spain.

Sandi Timmons, the kitchen supervisor, says they needed locals to show ERV drivers where to go. That's where we came in. Right away, Martha and I were split up. I went with an ERV group to Prentiss, she and Catherine went with a group near Hattiesburg High School.

Each ERV schedule goes something like this: My ERV loaded up the lunch, drove to downtown Prentiss to feed, drove back to Hattiesburg to pick up supper, drove back to Prentiss to feed. The next day, we went to Richton. The third day it was Bassfield. Two meals a day, every day, serving between 200-250 meals each feeding.

Seven ERVs are doing this on a daily basis in this area. The Southern Baptist team members, from Florida mainly, prepares the hot food and the ERVs deliver it to the rural areas that need it most.

In the first six days, they served 12,558 meals, 4,372 snacks, 3,196 bottles of water and so forth. Who are these people?

Sandi and Pat Timmons are here from California. They have been married 45 years. He is retired from a utility company. She is retired from Anheuser Busch,

where she basically was a scheduler, so her Red Cross role is a natural for her. They worked the tornadoes in Columbus back in 2002.

Blaise and Larry, both 52 years-old, came down from Erie, Pa. Blaise is retired, Larry has a automobile body shop.

Said Larry: "Blaise called me up one day, asked me what I was doing? I told him working. He said, 'Want to take a trip South with me?' I said, 'Where to?' He said Mississippi to help with the hurricane victims. So we loaded up and came down."

Folks, there are a bunch of stories like this one. Feel good stories. You don't hear enough about these kinds of dedicated people. Blaise and Larry had never been to Mississippi before. Here they were, loading Cambro containers of hot food into the ERVs, traveling the backroads to places like Brooklyn, New Augusta, Beaumont, and Columbia to feed people.

The same with Dale and Pat, a married couple, Matt from Washington, D.C., and even Jose from Spain. Many of them work in their own Red Cross chapters and drove these ERVs to South Mississippi. They wanted to help any way they could.

The satisfaction they get is hearing the people they serve say things like "thank you" or "bless you." When I handed a woman some plates of chicken and dumplings for her and her children in Richton, she had tears in her eyes and spoke of how they had no water, no ice, no power and her dad's medicine was about out.

On one trip, my wife was touched by a man from New Orleans, who didn't want food, just wanted to thank the Red Cross over and over. Some official from the city had told him all his relatives were dead - aunts, uncles, a brother, too, with all his six children. He had just been told by the Red Cross that the entire clan was healthy and safe in the Houston Astrodome.

You wish you could do more. You wish you didn't have to tell the 45-50 people still in line that you had no more food.

When I got home after that first night of volunteer work, it was still hot, the power was still out, but I felt good. So did Catherine. It was a good experience for her. She went back again the next day. We all did. And the next day, too.

According to Sandi, each passing day brings a few more LDVs. Some are considering further Red Cross training to become ERV drivers themselves.

As the Hattiesburg area moves from the immediate devastation of the storm towards "normalcy" once more there remains much work to be done. Some outlying communities still don't have power or water. But the Red Cross is doing all it can to send hot food to these areas.

Next time you see or pass one of these Emergency Response Vehicles on the road, give them a wave or a toot of your horn as a way of saying thanks.

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