

Ample refuge from strong storms needed

It is a question for which an answer is oftentimes neglected until the last minute. What would you and your family do if a large-magnitude hurricane hit?

Where would you go if evacuation was recommended or mandated by local emergency authorities?

If you chose to flee for safety from the deadly winds and high waters caused by such a storm, would there be adequate safe space for you and your family?

As the eastern Atlantic hurricane season draws near, there seems to be some disagreement existing among state and local emergency officials across Florida regarding the answers.

According to findings recently released from a study by the state Division of Emergency Management, almost every county in the state would be unable to provide enough space for the number of people seeking shelter from a major hurricane.

The study shows that almost 90 percent of Florida's 67 counties have a significant shortfall of needed space in facilities designed to withstand the sustained wind speed of a Category 4 or 5 hurricane.

A Category 4 hurricane packs winds of 131 to 155 mph; a Category 5 is 156 mph or higher.

Many local emergency officials around the state believe their communities are adequately prepared for such emergencies. They believe the state agency is unnecessarily exaggerating the numbers of people who will actually seek public shelter based on smaller magnitude storms in the past.

Either way, there is good and bad news in this debate for Citrus County.

First, the bad news. Locally, there are no public shelters available that are structurally rated to withstand a Category 4 or 5 hurricane, according to the state's 2002 Emergency Shelter Plan. This document illustrates that more than 86,500 Citrus County residents are living in areas considered to be vulnerable to wind or water surge damage during a hurricane having 130 mph winds or higher. It further estimates that more than 14,200 of these individuals would seek public shelter during such a storm, leaving local emergency planners with a deficit of an equal number.

Now, the good news. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, only two Category 5 hurricanes have struck the U.S. during the past century. A little less comforting, only 15 Category 4 hurricanes have made landfall during the same period of time

— yet those who remember the devastation that Hurricane Andrew wreaked on South Florida aren't as eager to play the odds as those who are unfamiliar with death and destruction caused by wicked winds and associated flooding.

In light of this data, one could take the position that, statistically, history is in our favor. We have designated facilities in the community that provide shelter from storms as high as a Category 3 hurricane. No locally threatening storm of higher magnitude has been recorded.

But, as the saying goes, it is better to be safe than sorry. As new, larger public facilities are built, careful consideration should be given to building them to meet the safety standards of higher magnitude storms.

THE ISSUE:

Hurricane shelter space lacking in county.

OUR OPINION:

Prepare for possibility of high-magnitude storms.

Agencies' teamwork

Mr. Doe, (we love Mr. Doe and want to protect his privacy) came to us after a couple of days at the Hayes Motel.

The Hayes Motel is an extension of the Jesus Is II Ministry, and is growing fast under the direction of Frank Bowers.

He had been referred from the Salvation Army after being released from the emergency room at Citrus Memorial Hospital.

He was a diabetic, on 24-hour oxygen and took many medications.

Not unusual in Citrus County, except Mr. Doe is 34 years old. He did not have insurance, and none of the medical facilities could move to help him quickly with the enormous costs that surround a case like this.



DuWayne Sipper

GUEST COLUMN

Rotech donated medical equipment, oxygen machines and many trips to check his oxygen to keep him alive. Dr. Kumar donated medicine from his closet to fill prescriptions. Dot Zipperer with the county helped with a \$100 donation for prescriptions.

Mr. Doe went to the hospital

three times by ambulance while he stayed with us, in just a month and a half. Linda Marsh, a Hospice nurse, and her daughter, Missy, helped me out of a situation that was obviously beyond our capabilities by checking on him.

Just an hour before Mr. Doe was found the last time, he was fine. All of us had gone our separate ways and started our day's work thinking he was all right. He was rushed to the hospital with a very low oxygen level, and while he was in the ambulance, his pulse weakened. He was given CPR, then remained in critical care for almost two weeks.

The doctors performed a tracheotomy, and he now resides in a full nursing facility that

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makes difference

can give him the care he needs and that a little shelter like ours cannot provide.

What makes this important? Three things: The teamwork of all the agencies — mentioned and not mentioned — are an example of the miracle of private and public agencies working together to solve problems like this every day with low staff/volunteers and funding.

We do not have many choices in our county when it comes to sheltering people, and Citrus Countians are mostly unaware of the day-to-day problems these agencies face, such as divorce, abuse, single motherhood, jail, evictions, loss of jobs, loss of transportation, lack of affordable housing, fixed incomes, disabilities,

mental health, drug/alcohol abuse; the list goes on.

Citrus County still may not understand the homeless problem as a whole. The causes of homelessness or near-homelessness affect each of us. It taxes the best of our agencies, and costs our public agencies dearly when responding after the fact. If we have a picture in our minds of "bums on the street," we need to erase it once and for all.

The Path of Citrus County, which is a shelter, and these other agencies, need your financial and physical support to ease the burden of homelessness. We encourage everyone to get involved, or call for more information on how they can help. Everyone has some

form of a gift to give to the community, even something as simple as making phone calls. Help us help them.

Mr. Doe called us several more times to tell us that he was doing fine.

He asked for his Bible, some personal items — and to also just tease me a bit. I always knew when he was feeling better because he liked to tease me so much.

This was his way of saying "I love you, man!"

DuWayne Sipper, executive director of The Path of Citrus County, can be reached at 527-6500, 746-6746. His organization also has a Web site: pathofcitrus.org.

'You don't need a home to vote'

If you don't have a telephone, credit card or an address to show others that you are an official somebody, you are a nobody.

Voting, for example.

Voting is one of the most important rights of citizenship, but without an address to write down on the registration form, the voting machinery could easily grind to a shuddering silence merely for lack of an address.

Fortunately, this is not so in Citrus County, where every resident, even someone living in the woods, is encouraged to vote.

This is thanks to the work of a small group of good-doers in the county who are working to help the homeless to regain their lives.

Working with Supervisor of Elections Susan Gill, this group of activists and representatives of faith-based organizations have worked out a way to overcome the "address" challenge.

They came together last Tuesday in the dining hall of St. Margaret's Episcopal Church in Inverness, just after the church's Feed My Sheep program (organized and run by Ruth Falsetti and her crew) was finished feeding a group of elderly residents.

On the green board in large letters,



Steve Arthur
**FABLES &
FOIBLES**

meeting organizer John Young had written a simple message: "You don't need a home to vote."

That's what Gill said, too.

She and her assistant Maureen "Mo" Baird said homeless people can get voter registration application forms at libraries, drivers license bureaus, at banks, city halls, at state agencies and post offices as well as voter registration offices.

Homeless people will be registered if they qualify to vote: If they are U.S. citizens, consider Citrus County their home, are 18 years or older, have not been convicted of a felony or "adjudicated mentally incapacitated with respect to voting in Florida or any other state."

Gill said a special provision is in place to allow the homeless who consider Citrus County their home to vote. They will vote at the fairgrounds.

"We don't expect to have a lot of homeless people to register to vote; however, if there are, we don't want to disenfranchise anyone."

She said a new statewide database linking all 67 Florida counties will make it easy to detect voter fraud, preventing double or multiple registration.

Young said that a voter registration effort to reach the homeless will begin

at the various homeless shelters and soup kitchens around the county, an effort that will coincide with a national homeless voters' registration week of Sept. 22-28.

The homeless in Citrus County, according to DuWayne Sipper of the faith-based shelter The Path of Citrus County, are not interstate drifters, but rather people who have lived in the county for a long time.

Single mothers, couples down on their luck, people who have been evicted or escaped from their homes and people with mental problems, he said, are among the growing number of homeless people in the county.

"There was a woman with three children who turned up on our doorstep this morning," he said. "I had to turn her away because we didn't have any room for her. It's becoming more who we are not helping rather than who we are helping."

He said helping homeless people to register to vote goes a long way toward helping them recover their self-respect.

That's good, because for the 3.5 million people experiencing homelessness each year, self-respect may be the only valuable thing they have.

Steve Arthur, a *Chronicle* columnist, can be reached at 563-5660, Ext. 375, or by e-mail at sarthur@chronicleonline.com.

Sipper joins seminar

The Path director DuWayne Sipper was in St. Paul, Minn.,

from May 30 to June 6.

Every year, the Association of Gospel Missions puts on a national seminar in a major city in America.

More than 280 missions now belong to this association. They have

assigned The Path a mentor who has more than 20 years of experience. Classes that were taken ranged from addictions, women's programs, job placement services, peacemaking and fund-raising.

Networking took place on a major scale. Attendees shared ideas with missions who had similar challenges ahead of them. Many materials were purchased to help in the implementation of The Path's program in Citrus County.

Walk-a-Thon set



DuWayne Sipper
The Path director