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Island preps for 2018 Hurricane Season



Cedar Key Police Chief Virgil Sandlin (left) and Cedar Key Fire Chief Robert Robinson stand near a poster that reminds people to evacuate when they are told to do so. The reminder also notes that the shelters for Levy County are all east of U.S. Highway 19.

Story, Photos and Video

By Jeff M. Hardison © May 31, 2018 at 11:28 p.m.

CEDAR KEY -- The Annual Hurricane Day event in Cedar Key on Thursday (May 31) once again provided several key resources and opportunities to island residents and visitors.

<https://youtu.be/N9IF5TRXSZQ>

In this video, Ryan Watson of Central Florida Electric Cooperative uses a scale model to show how electricity can arc from one point to another point and kill a person.

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There is a time to leave the island, and one way to know when that time has arrived is to hear the evacuation sirens.

Helping all residents and visitors of Levy County to prepare for, endure and



recover from disasters, the Levy County Emergency Management Department is

comprised of (from left) Director John MacDonald,

Assistant Director David Peaton and Planner Leatha Keene. They were

helping people Thursday at Cedar Key's Annual Hurricane Day.

These three professionals are part of the statewide network of people in

Emergency Management, and they are the team for Levy County.

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Ryan Watson of Central Florida Electric Cooperative stands behind a scale model that he uses to show how electricity can arc from one point to another point and kill a person. This particular learning tool for safety is new, replacing one that served for many years before it wore out.



(from left) Jennifer Krouchick, a candidate for a Master of Science Degree in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Florida; Kristin Buckingham, a recent UF graduate who earned her

Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning and who now works in Tallahassee with the Florida Division of Emergency Management, stand with Dr. Kathryn Frank, an associate professor at the UF College of Design, Construction and Planning. They are among the people who designed an excellent website related to informal practices for storm preparations and recovery, which previously had never been documented.

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Esta Johnston (at right in a light blue shirt) completes paperwork to obtain her re-entry pass for return to her island home after an evacuation. Helping her and other residents is at left) Deputy City Clerk Crystal Sharp. Sitting at the table but not seen in this photo was Cedar Key City Commissioner Susan Rosenthal.



Cedar Key Vice Mayor Sue Colson (left) and Levy County Commissioner Lilly Rooks socialize at the event.

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Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Mosquito Control Outreach Specialist Caitlin Gill and Levy County Mosquito Control Director Matt Weldon help visitors know about the need to drain areas that rainwater and remain stagnant, and to cover from dusk to dawn to reduce the ability of mosquitoes to cause health issues.

Kearston Andrews, information specialist with the Office of Levy County Supervisor of Elections Tammy Jones, (left) helps Dr. Michael 'Mike' Allen, a professor of Fisheries and Aquatic Science in the School of Forest Resources and Conservation at the University of Florida who works at the Nature Coast Biological Station on Cedar Key, as he registers to be a Cedar



Key voter. The Cedar Key resident can now vote in city elections, as well as elections in Levy County, in Florida, and in the United States of America.

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Donna Bushnell of the Cedar Key Woman's Club stands behind the counter where she is among the women who helped serve hotdogs to people participating in the event on Thursday (May 31) at the Cedar Key Community Center.

A wealth of information available there can be used to improve the ability to prepare for disaster, get through the event and then to recover from it.

The golden nuggets of information given at the event come from professionals and lay people across a broad spectrum of life.

Starting with vital points for residents and business owners, there are some key elements that might have been accomplished right away that morning and afternoon.

First, there is the attaining of a hurricane re-entry pass. Registering and obtaining the re-entry pass will expedite returning to a homestead after an evacuation.

This day was not just Hurricane Day on Cedar Key, but also it was Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day - for Cedar Key residents only (no commercial hazardous waste was accepted at this event).

Cedar Key Vice Mayor Sue Colson explained that she likes this program of convenient hazardous household waste collection offered by Waste Pro, because in the event of a storm surge, or other disaster where the people are returning to their property to salvage what they can, she prefers to see less hazardous materials in the rubble, not to mention what might have been washed out into the Gulf of Mexico had it not been removed to a proper place before a storm event.

Beyond being able to register for the re-entry pass and being able to drop off household hazardous materials, island residents and others were welcome to walk away with a plethora of information. And the Cedar Key Woman's Club sponsored hotdogs

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and drinks for visitors as well.

Perhaps the crown jewel of the event this year was a brand-new display that came to fruition after Cedar Key Vice Mayor Sue Colson interacted with Jennifer Krouchick, a candidate for a Master of Science Degree in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Florida. Krouchick expects to complete her studies and to accept her Master's Degree from UF this summer or fall.

The project that came into being and which was on display Thursday is a very well documented set of informal practices for emergency preparedness and response to hurricanes in the Cedar Key and Rosewood areas of Levy County.

Dr. Kathryn Frank, an associate professor at the UF College of Design, Construction and Planning oversaw the project that included Krouchick, Kristin Buckingham and Belinda Nettles.

Buckingham recently graduated UF with her Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning. She works in Tallahassee now with the Florida Division of Emergency Management, primarily in the area of mitigation.

Nettles, who was unable to attend the event Thursday in Cedar Key, is an MLA and doctoral candidate at the UF College of Design, Construction and Planning.

The students interviewed Cedar Key officials and residents to create an extensive website with documents that will pass along knowledge to persons who are newly assisting with hurricane preparedness, response and recovery in Cedar Key and Rosewood.

Dr. Frank, these three graduate students and the UF Student Planning Association completed this project after Hurricane Hermine's storm surge hit Cedar Key.

The website is a treasure trove of information to help residents in this part of Florida, however of the lessons can be applied elsewhere, and thinking individuals may modify some of these practices as well as synthesize their own to better weather the storm during Hurricane Season 2018 (June 1-Nov. 30, 2018) in Florida.

A starting point for the project is <https://changinglevycoast.org/informal-practices/>. Clicking around the website, a person can spend an hour or more and be better prepared for storms and storm recovery. There is even an interactive map, with a wealth of information. The best method for a person to make use of this resource is to visit it, and then to click around.

Vice Mayor Colson told HardisonInk.com that she would like to see area Realtors provide newcomers to the Cedar Key area with this and other information, so that they can be better prepared for any potential storm events.

In addition to the UF professor and scientists, several Levy County departments were at the event to help people as well.

Levy County Supervisor of Elections Tammy Jones sent Information Specialist Kearston Andrews. Early on during the morning, Specialist Andrews registered one new voter within the City of Cedar Key and she had helped another voter update his records.

The Levy County Emergency Management team of Director John MacDonald, Assistant Director David Peaton and Planner Leatha Keene were available to help any person learn about this department's services.

Levy County Mosquito Control Director Matt Weldon and Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Mosquito Control Outreach Specialist Caitlin Gill were present. Gill works out of the office in Alachua County, but she is responsible for overseeing 12 North Central Florida counties for the FDACS. Weldon is

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also the director of all parks and recreations under the direction of the Levy County Board of County Commissioners.

County Commissioner Lilly Rooks, within whose district Cedar Key lies, was present to help constituents find answers as well.

Representing Waste Pro at the event was Howell E. "Trip" Lancaster III. Lancaster also serves as the mayor of the City of Fanning Springs.

City of Cedar Key staff were on hand as well, including Police Chief Virgil Sandlin and Fire Chief Robert Robinson. Deputy City Clerk Crystal Sharp helped residents complete paperwork to walk away with the new version of the re-entry certificates.

Providing an informative presentation about the dangers from electrocution was Central Florida Electric Cooperative Member Services Representative Ryan Watson.

"Look before you dig," he said, "and be aware of your surroundings."

Watson reminded listeners that there are electric cables buried underground. There are wires going to pump houses and to air conditioners.

He also explained that electricity can travel on material that may not seem to be able to conduct electricity. A child flying a kite and using a cotton thread can be electrocuted if the thread has been handled by him enough to absorb his or her perspiration.

Using a scale model, he demonstrated how electricity can arc from an overhead wire to shoot down an aluminum ladder.

A homeowner could be sweeping leaves off of their roof, he said, and they could come too close to an exposed wire leading into the home from the pole and transformer. Those wires are thoroughly covered with tape when they are installed, he said, however the sun, rain and time can reduce that layer of safety.

In regard to storm situations, whenever a person sees wires down, they should contact the electric cooperative or other utility provider. Wires that are down may not be sparking, but they can still be live with enough power to kill a person. Wet ground around downed wires carries an electrical charge too and should be avoided.