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Dixie County Emergency Services leaders share information



The American flag flying at the Dixie County Emergency Operations Center on Tuesday evening (June 11) a bit before 7 p.m. is in the foreground, as the moon can be seen in the distance above the flag. During fair weather, the Emergency Management aspect of Dixie County Emergency Services is in a ready mode, prepared to go into action. It also informs the public about methods to be prepared as individuals. Meanwhile, simultaneously the firefighters, paramedics and administrators of DCES respond to any calls

for immediate help to save lives, save property and ease suffering.

Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © June 13, 2019 at 4:39 p.m.

CROSS CITY – Leaders of Dixie County Emergency Services provided a wealth of information during a two-hour presentation Tuesday night (June 11).

Built like a fortress to withstand high winds and the objects carried and thrown in those winds, the Dixie County Emergency Operations Center is headquarters

for first responders and agency leaders to conduct operations during disasters.

During times of everyday life with no disaster, the EOC serves as

the nerve center for fire and medical first responders.



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Dixie County Emergency Services Chief Darian Brown, the leader of DCES, speaks about the functions of this county department.

The first thing listeners learned was that Dixie County Emergency Services is structured with firefighting responders, Emergency Medical Services personnel and Emergency Management all on the same team.

In many counties, like in Gilchrist County and in Levy County, firefighting and EMS are combined with Emergency Management working as a separate entity.

Dixie County Emergency Services Chief Darian Brown, the leader of the DCES organization, opened the program.

Chief Brown answers to Dixie County Manager Tim Alexander. All Dixie County departments are under the leadership of County Manager Alexander, and he is answerable to the five-member Dixie County Board of County Commissioners, who are at the service of all of the residents and visitors of Dixie County.

Like the other county constitutional officers, the County Commission members are elected by the eligible and participating voters in Dixie County.

Chief Brown opened the session by expressing his gratitude and the appreciation of the department for all of the people who showed up to learn about DCES and the 2019 Hurricane Season.

Before speaking about hurricanes, which falls under the responsibilities of Division

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Chief of Emergency Management Scott Garner, Chief Brown spoke about the DCES as a whole.

In addition to Chief Brown and Division Chief Garner, the other leaders in this department are Division Chief of Fire Service Operations Roy Bass, Division Chief of Emergency Medical Services Scott Pendarvis, Division Chief of 9-1-1 (including the maps, data, and all technical or computer issues) Chuck Elton; and Dixie County Emergency Services Firefighter-Paramedic Mandy Lemmermen, who deals on the front lines with members of the press



Dixie County Division Chief of 9-1-1 Chuck Elton stands next to the 25-plus red-colored Build Your Bucket kits provided by the Florida Department of Health's Dixie-Gilchrist-Levy Unit. With a turnout of about this many people, everyone who wanted one of these buckets went home with one after the information session. These buckets and include several items people should have as they prepare for disaster. They are not all inclusive. For instance, Dixie County Emergency Services Chief Darian Brown joked that there is not one gallon per-day, per-person of water for seven days in these buckets. Nevertheless, they included mosquito repellent, hand sanitizer, sturdy gloves, two bags from the Red Cross which each included daily hygiene items, a manual can-opener and several pieces of literature to help an individual know a plethora of information in regard to preparing for and surviving from disasters.

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Dixie County Division Chief of Emergency Management Scott Garner prepares to take questions after the two-hour presentation by himself and Dixie County Emergency Services Chief Darian Brown. In addition to thoroughly answering any questions, the team of DCES division chiefs also provided complete tours of the Dixie County Emergency Operation Center for any interested person Tuesday evening.

Here are 15 Grab and Go Emergency Kits. Provided by the Florida Department of Health's Dixie-Gilchrist-Levy Unit, these kits went to this many people who wanted one of the kits after the information session. These kits included safety and survival items in a weather-resistant pail. This kit includes an emergency blanket, two pair of medical gloves, one roll of duct tape, two dust masks, a flashlight with AA batteries, a 2,400-calorie food bar, a multifunction knife, two light sticks, six wet-wipe towelettes, a rain poncho, an AM-FM radio with AAA batteries, a basic overnight hygiene kit, an emergency whistle, four packets of emergency water-treatment, a first-aid kit, a pill reminder box, a tissue packet, a pen and a legal pad.



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Dixie County Division Chief of Fire Service Operations Roy Bass (seated) and Dixie County Division Chief of Emergency Management Scott Garner listen while their leader Dixie County Chief of Emergency Services Darian Brown introduces listeners to the entire DCES field of public service to save lives every day – not just during hurricanes, wildfires or other major disasters.

Hurricane Michael made landfall Oct. 10, 2018 at 1:40 p.m. near Mexico Beach. It was first listed as a strong Category 4 hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 155 m.p.h., however meteorologists later determined it was a Category 5 hurricane.

Hurricane Michael was the first Category 5 hurricane to strike the contiguous United States since Hurricane Andrew in 1992. People who live in the Panhandle of Florida have gone for more than 18 months without enough help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to recover.

Beyond learning about the limits of the daily firefighting and emergency medical service that residents and visitors of Dixie County enjoy, the single most important message from this session on Tuesday night is for all people to exercise self-reliance, and to be prepared for disaster.

Create an evacuation plan. Stock supplies to be ready for seven days with no outside

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help, including a water supply for drinking and cleaning, in the event staying at home is the option selected.

At the forefront of his part of the presentations, Chief Brown said the whole 700 square-miles of Dixie County are covered by the members of the DCES.

Every division chief has specific duties in relation to the fire service, the Emergency Medical Service and Emergency Management, Chief Brown said. Beyond that, however, everyone line in the organization has other responsibilities.



Dixie County Division Chief of Emergency Medical Services Scott Pendarvis is the leader who is responsible for ambulance crews that transport people to the various hospitals in Gainesville. The paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians in these vehicles are the individuals who are the most vital to patients during the first period of time in those scenes, because it is a relatively long ride to the hospital for a person who has broken bones, or is bleeding or is suffering from some other serious health issue.

Dixie County EMS operates three ambulances with two people on each ambulance 24-hours-a-day, Chief Brown said.

As far as paid firefighting personnel, Chief Brown said, there is a team stationed in

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Old Town with an engine that is advanced life support capable and can do anything an ambulance can do except transport people, Brown said. There is also fourth ambulance located in Old Town, which can be used for transportation if needed Brown said.

Calls for help in regard to firefighting or EMS are constantly happening, he said, as the tones went off in the background for the on-duty personnel to respond at that moment that evening.

Horseshoe Beach, Eugene and Suwannee are three coastal communities in Dixie County, which have volunteer firefighters, the chief said. There are volunteer stations in Old Town and in the First District (Cross City), he said.

Some of the volunteer leaders and members of those stations were present that night and Chief Brown thanked them for their service as well as for their attendance.

“It takes a coordinated effort from everybody to make this happen, he said.

He went on to say that there’s a DCES squad truck based at the Cross City Volunteer Fire Department. He mentioned his gratitude for the joint effort provided by the city of Cross City.

These on a daily basis DCES as nine people on duty ad on the trucks, Brown said. Three of them are on fire engines and six of them are on ambulances, he said.

With three shifts, that equals 27 different people.

Twelve to 18 people are needed to fight a house fire, he said.

“We don’t have that (number of paid personnel to fight a house fire),” he said. “That’s why each of these supervisors or fire-certified. They go to help. If it’s a medical call, we go to help. If it’s a hurricane we all stay to help Chief Garner.”

The need for volunteers, while apparent, is becoming harder to fill. Requirements to volunteer have increased, while the number of available humans who can dedicate the time and answer at a moment’s notice continues to dwindle.

Equipment maintenance is another matter that must be dealt with. One ambulance alone will log 70,000 miles a year because of the need to drive to Gainesville for emergency room hospital service, Chief Pendarvis said when Chief Brown asked him how far each ambulance goes in a year.

“We’re more than here just for hurricanes,” he said.

Situations change. Within one day, the county can go from being on the highest danger level for wildfires, only to be drenched by rain and then be in danger of flash flooding, Chief Brown said.

As Chief Garner started his presentation in regard to Emergency Management and the hurricane season, he thanked Lola Butler, preparedness and response county coordinator of the Dixie County unit of the Florida Department of Health, for her help in obtaining many of the door prizes that went out that night

Not only did almost everyone go home with a big red bucket filled with items (from the Florida Department of Health and the Red Cross) and a smaller white container with great supplies (from the Florida Department of Health), but some people won weather radios, weather stations and rain gauges.

Chief Garner mentioned that during a hurricane event, all DCES trucks are stopped from responding when winds reach 45 miles per hour or higher, because they can be moved by a gust. A 12,000- to 15,000-pound vehicle going on State Road 26 to Gainesville pushed into oncoming traffic is not something anyone wants, Chief Garner said.

“I don’t know about you guys, but I can’t see wind,” he said.

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Therefore, he added, no one can know when a gust will move a truck.

All disasters are local, he said. When the county exceeds its ability to provide help, it asks the state for assistance. Likewise, when the state reaches its limit of resources, state leaders request help from the federal government.

Reaching those thresholds, he continued takes time. That is why no person should think FEMA is an end-all for solving disaster-related issues.

The people of North Florida are still reeling from Hurricane Michael and FEMA's response 18 months later has many people wondering about the federal government's desire and ability to respond to disasters.

The biggest thing, Garner said is to make a plan.

Click [HERE](#) to use a resource for making a disaster plan.

While some planners suggest to make the plan to cover three days, Garner said he recommends making a plan to cover seven days before help arrives.

It took 14 days before supplies were available to many of the victims of Hurricane Michael, Garner said. Counties all had to rely on their own resources for two weeks, he said.

From Hurricane Michael, there was no electric power (other than generators and batteries) from seven to 32 days, he added.

Know where you live, he said. Know if the home is substandard construction; if it a mobile home; if it is in a low-lying area.

Among the many topics Garner covered was the special needs shelter.

Individuals who have special needs, Garner said, such as oxygen or consistent electricity go to special needs shelters. People in Dixie County with special needs go to the shelter in Bell (Gilchrist County), because currently Dixie County cannot provide for those needs.

Chief Garner recommends that people with special needs register now. To register, click [HERE](#).

Storm surge is something to consider as well in regard to hurricanes. Dixie County coastal residents are advised to review the map for elevations in the area.

Garner let people know, six inches of water moving across a road can displace a passenger car. One Dixie County woman was driving a four-door Nissan pickup truck that was swept into a ditch within the past few years. She was going to work in the dark.

Water was crossing the road near Mango Acres, north of Cross City on one Christmas Day. She tried to drive through it and her little pickup truck was swept into a ditch. By the time rescuers arrived, the water was up to her neck in the truck, and it was up to the armpits of the first responders (including Chief Bass) who saved her life, Garner said.

She had to be taken to a hospital due to hypothermia and her disabled husband had to be evacuated from their home due to the impending flood, Garner said.

As he concluded the program, Garner reminded people to build a kit. Certainly, he understands this can be a burden monetarily. However, work on the kit a little a time.

Start by creating a stockpile of water. For instance, two people would need 14 gallons at least for seven days. For people who have a dispenser that can take five-gallon jugs, three of those in constant supply, rotating with use, is one method.

When the storm is known to be coming, fill a bathtub with water.

Stock up on non-perishable foods and keep a manual can opener ready. Visit Bass Pro for "camping foods," he suggested.

Batteries are another item to stock up on. Keep a weather radio and an AM/FM

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battery-powered radio. Batteries wear out, he said. There are wind-up powered radios, and flashlights that can be charged by shaking them.

Garner reminded people to make themselves prepared for disaster by creating their kits, knowing their surroundings, knowing evacuation routes (more than one because that one may be closed), and to use common sense as storms approach.

As for the regular season of June 1 through Nov. 30, there have been storms in April and January that were not within the normal timeframe.

As for the predicted number of storms in the coming season, Garner said it just takes one storm to make all the difference in family members' lives. The first named storm of the 2019 season has already happened.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration expects nine to 15 named storms during the season, including four to eight hurricanes and two to four major hurricanes.

Last year (2018), 15 named storms, eight hurricanes and two major hurricanes tore through the Atlantic Basin.

The named storms for the Atlantic Ocean (and Gulf of Mexico) for 2019 are Andrea (done), Barry, Chantal, Dorian, Erin, Fernand, Gabrielle, Humberto, Imelda, Jerry, Karen,

Lorenzo, Melissa, Nestor, Olga, Pablo, Rebekah, Sebastien, Tanya, Van, and Wendy.

In the event that more than 21 named storms form in the Atlantic Ocean, the National Hurricane Center says additional storms will be named from the Greek alphabet. Alpha, Beta, etc.