

INSIDE NEWPORT NEWS

Thinking regionally for storm season

When Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans in 2005, we remember reading about the incompetence of



Joe Lawlor

the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Newport News City Manager Neil Morgan, who also serves as the city's emergency manager, said he had a Katrina-like experience when FEMA was called to Hampton Roads in 2003 during Hurricane Isabel, at least in terms of the federal response to a disaster.

"Our experience with FEMA was disappointing," Morgan said. "We kept getting the impression that the cavalry (FEMA) was going to arrive, and, frankly, they never arrived in the way that we thought."

Two years later, Katrina happened and FEMA took a beating by the media and in the eyes of the public. What's harder to discern, sometimes, is what lessons were learned.

While I don't know how FEMA itself is doing, I learned last week that guidelines FEMA handed down to localities and independent efforts by local government officials to think regionally seem to be working. Hurricane season starts Wednesday.

After all, when a hurricane hits, it's your local government's police, fire and public works employees who will respond first, before FEMA officials even set foot in town. So any improvements among Newport News, Hampton, York County, James City County and so on could have a greater impact on how your family weathers a disaster than FEMA.

To that end, local governments are participating in more regional exercises and investing in radio and computer equipment to make sure everyone can communicate with each other. It's when a hurricane hits that municipal borders mean very little, and, of course, Hampton would help out Newport News and vice versa.

And local governments are working on streamlining the response so that decisions are made more efficiently and help arrives sooner. For instance, the emergency shelters at Warwick and Menchville high schools already have generators handy in case of a hurricane. That's one extra step saved when people are scrambling during the aftermath.

Morgan and other local emergency officials told me that they also are moving to FEMA's National Incident Management System. That means when FEMA does arrive, all local, state and federal officials will use the same terminology, again saving time.

Festival day

The King-Lincoln Park Day will be Saturday from noon to 5 p.m., featuring music, food, nature walks, athletic and fishing contests, a fish fry, and a sidewalk chalk artist. Admission and parking are free. The park is at the intersection of 6th Street and Jefferson Avenue.

Redistricting

Newport News will host three public hearings for political redistricting of the North, Central and South city council and school board districts. The first public hearing will be 7 p.m. Thursday in the James Room at Fountain Plaza II at City Center.

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NEWPORT NEWS

Bridging rough waters in Africa

Newport News men get firsthand look at Rotary's Zambia work

By Shannon Humphrey
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NEWPORT NEWS — When Chris Davidson and Ken Hodge were in their truck cutting through a cornfield in a remote region of Zambia, they didn't know what to expect from the villagers they were about to meet.

"I just remember out of nowhere all of these people came. They were singing, beating drums and sticking their hands through the truck windows to shake our hands," said Davidson, president-elect of the Rotary Club of Newport News.

"The women and children were so excited to see us, and very appreciative of what we were there to do," Davidson said.

Two years ago, the Rotary Club of Newport News began fundraising efforts to support building footbridges in remote areas of Zambia. The group raised enough money to apply for a \$300,000 Rotary International grant. In total, \$360,000 was raised for the project.

"These are bridges that are desperately needed during the rainy season," Davidson said. "During this time, the water gets so deep and rushes by so fast that it's impossible for children to cross to get to school, or for the villagers to get to clinics and markets."

The idea for the project came from one of their club's members, Ken Frantz, the founder of Bridges to Prosperity, a nonprofit that builds suspension bridges throughout the developing world.

The Rotary Club of Newport



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS DAVIDSON

The Newport News Rotary Club's Chris Davidson sits with children he met during a recent trip to Zambia, where the club has helped fund and build several bridges.

News partnered with the Rotary Club of Nkwazi, based out of Lusaka, Zambia's capital, to complete the project. Both of the clubs helped supervise the construction of each bridge under the lead engineer for the project, Zoe Paciani.

"It was a massive undertaking, being that the driving time between some of these bridges could be from six to 11 hours on very badly damaged roads," said Davidson who traveled to the area last month.

Their driving time was nothing compared to what the villagers had to face every day.

"In one village, before we built the bridge, people had to walk three hours to get to school or the clinic. After the bridge was complete, it took them 15 to 20 minutes," Davidson said.

The sixth and final bridge for the project is now being completed, and has been funded in large part by the government of Zambia.

"They've taken an active interest in seeing that this program

continues in the country," said Davidson. "The actual bridge-building was done by the villagers themselves when possible, with the thought being to empower them to continue this kind of development after we left."

"Some of the bridges that were built help more than 2,000 people a day," said Davidson. "The whole experience really makes you appreciate what we take for granted here in the United States every day, the simple things like good roads for transportation and water."

naturalizer

Naturalizer "Solana"
White, pink, 6-10M.

Clarks "Dusk Aztec"
Silver, bronze, pink, 6-10M.

49⁹⁹

Clarks

Memorial Day Weekend

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