

St. Denis Brings Storm Message Home

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to Louis, "The level of instruction provided a good balance between strategic business principals and traditional business acumen.

'American Junior' Finalist Performs on Longboat

"American Junior" finalist **Danielle White** performed at the **Longboat Island Chapel** Sunday. White, a 12-year-old Lakewood Ranch resident was one of five singers selected on Fox's music show, "American Juniors." The two titles sung by White included **Mariah Carey's** "Hero" and an inspirational song called "When You Believe." The chapel's Musical Director, **Joseph Spinella**, said the church received a strong turnout for the performance.

Key Employee Certified



Longboat Key Purchasing Manager **Gerald Wilson** received the Certified Professional Public Buyer certification from the Universal Public Purchasing Certification Council.

"I am always looking for ways to expand my knowledge in purchasing. I love it. It's my thing," said Wilson.

Wilson worked for two years to obtain the certification. He completed a purchasing training course and a written exam, confirming his knowledge in public purchasing.

Wilson has been in purchasing for nearly 30 years. He worked in the purchasing division of the Polk County Board of Commissioners for more than 25 years. He has worked for The Town of Longboat Key for almost five years.

Ammons Completes Homeland Security Training

Longboat Key's **Susan Ammons** recently completed the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's advanced public information officer's course. The course focuses on public information responsibilities in large-scale emergencies. The training will help Ammons, assistant to Town Manager **Bruce St. Denis**, assist in saving lives, protecting property and enhancing disaster planning, response and recovery on Longboat Key.

Next 'Bagels with Bob' session scheduled

Longboat Key Town Commissioner **Bob Dawson** will hold the next "Bagels with Bob" communications session Thurs., Sept. 9 at 9:30 at the Town Police headquarters building, 5460 Gulf of Mexico Drive.

The session is open to all residents, visitors and businesses on Longboat Key. Reservations are not required.

Special guests will include Town Manager **Bruce St. Denis** and Police Chief **Al Hogle**.

Rebecca Blue
Staff Writer

Longboat Key Town Manager **Bruce St. Denis** still shakes his head when reminded of the Longboaters that decided to stay on the island when Hurricane Charley was headed this way. "The people who stay are not heroes. I can't imagine what is worth risking your life to stay. There were people on Sanibel Island who stayed and rode out the storm and ended up hovering in their interior rooms, covering themselves with their beds. There is no great heroism in that."

Not only is it dangerous to ride out a hurricane, but it also slows recovery and clean-up efforts in the end. "Instead of going back in and doing an orderly return, we have to approach the island in a different method. We have to go into search and rescue. These people are actually holding up others from getting back on the island," said St. Denis.

That actually happened on Sanibel Island. "There were people who stayed on the island of Sanibel and it hampered the return efforts," said St. Denis. Officials end up spending a lot of time trying to locate those who stayed. And without cell phone usage, this can be time consuming.

While the rest of Longboat Key went back to their normal lifestyles, still thankful that Hurricane Charley spared the island, St. Denis volunteered in Punta Gorda and Sanibel Island, two of the cities hit hardest by the hurricane.

St. Denis spent two days in Punta Gorda and one on Sanibel Island. He spent his time shadowing Punta Gorda City Manager **Willard Beck** and Sanibel Island City Manager **Judith Zimomra**. "Additional fire and police officials were being sent down to help out, but the city managers were on their own. I offered to come down, suggesting we bounce ideas off of each other and they both agreed," said St. Denis.

Upon his arrival, St. Denis said his initial thought was "how did the people survive and how long would it take for them to

rebuild their lives."

"What you see on TV doesn't do justice to what happened on the ground," said St. Denis. "It's all around you." There was still debris along the side of the road, leaving him to imagine what the area looked like when it was all over the place, before the



St. Denis

clean-up efforts began. "There are still people living in houses without roofs and without walls." Without walls and roofs, the initial damage worsens. It rains and the damage just continues.

Both cities lost all of their utilities. Many roofs were damaged. Those with tile roofs, like many houses on Longboat Key, saw a lot of destruction. "A lot of tile flew off in Punta Gorda. Flying tile was responsible for some of the damage in the area," said St. Denis.

As for mobile homes, they were devastated. "I was driving home and to the left of the highway all of the mobile homes were devastated. To the right there were two big piles of metal. Mobile homes had broken free and rolled across the highway," said St. Denis. Pieces of the mobile homes had hit telephone poles, bending around them like paper clips. He says the destruction of those mobile homes are similar to what could have happened to mobile home parks on Longboat Key, had Charley stayed on its original path.

Homes built before the 1980's up to the mid 1990's had a lot of damage in and outside, said St. Denis. "Those homes were built before the code changes occurred. Homes built post 1995 did pretty well with the high winds." St. Denis said older homes in The Village and in the St. Judes area would have seen a high amount of wind damage.

Punta Gorda

The city of Punta Gorda lost a lot of its housing stock and some of its vegetation. The area took a brunt amount of wind damage, according to St. Denis. "A lot of the older structures failed." He says Longboat Key's Country Club Shores

would have seen a lot of the same type of exposure.

After the hurricane passed, the first action in Punta Gorda was to take care of the immediate needs. "They had no water, no sewer. People were hurt," said St. Denis.

Sanibel Island

On Sanibel Island, gulf front homes received a lot of damage. "There was nothing to block the wind," said St. Denis. "A lot of the damage Sanibel Island had is what gulf side structures on Longboat Key would have gotten."

Australian Pines on Sanibel all came down. "There were massive piles of tender that now pose a future fire problem," said St. Denis. Areas such as Quick Point and The Village that still have a lot of Australian Pines would have taken a long time to dig out, said St. Denis. "There was a lot of damage created from pines falling on top of houses."

Houses with native trees fared well, according to St. Denis. "The trees blocked the winds very well."

Lessons Learned

One of the lessons St. Denis learned in the aftermath of Hurricane Charley was the need to have a list of all generators in advance. "We need to know which cities have one they can loan out. Then instead of waiting to get one, you can have one on its way," said St. Denis.

Another lesson St. Denis learned involves the boil water advisory. "Clearly that could have been handled better." There were a lot of mixed messages roaming around Longboat Key regarding the boil water advisory. The advisory was lifted and later reinstated following water samples.

St. Denis was happy with the operation of the Emergency Operations Center. "They were excellent. I am confident that we would perform very well through the EOC standpoint."

Appreciation

St. Denis is very proud of his Longboat Key employees. "They were some of the first people out to help on Friday the 13th. I am very appreciative of their willingness to go down and help."

Town Helps Rebuild Ravaged Punta Gorda

Rebecca Blue
Staff Writer

Lack of greenery, trees without leaves, debris everywhere, power lines down, buildings flattened, power poles snapped into two, dangling transformers, in short-complete devastation. Those are just some of the descriptions given by service workers of the Longboat Key Public Works department following their work trip to Punta Gorda last week.

It's one thing to see pictures of destruction, but it's a whole different feeling to see the destruction first hand. "We were eight miles from Punta Gorda and I thought, my goodness if it's this bad here, what's it going to be like when we get downtown?" Said Public Works Operations Manager **Neal Martin**. And he soon found out. "It was pretty intense to see the damage in person."

Martin said in a way he felt selfish being relieved that it didn't head our way. "When I got home I looked around and was so thankful, because many of those people in Punta Gorda still don't have a home."

Public Works employee **Brad "Doc" Walter** says he didn't know what to expect when arriving in Punta Gorda. "It was pretty shocking to get an idea of what Hurricane Charley could have done here.

It made you think."

Public Works employee **John Michael** was curious to what he would see upon reaching Punta Gorda. "I didn't know what we were going to find when we got there." He added "One thing that left quite an impression on me was to see people from municipalities all over the state coming together to help each other out."

Martin and Walter brought the ravaged City of Punta Gorda generators to power the pumps for its wastewater system. Subsequently, Walter and Michael joined officials from Delray Beach in hooking up additional generators and getting the wastewater plant flowing again along with Punta Gorda's 104 lift stations.

Walter and Michael also helped move Punta Gorda's telemetry machine, which is a system that controls and monitors lift stations from a single location. The system was in the Public Works complex, which lost its roof during the Hurricane. "Officials were actually working in a building with only four walls," said Michael. They reran wires and hooked the system up in a different location.

Walter and Michael worked in Punta Gorda until Tues. Aug. 24, putting in more than 30 hours. "They were in need of some experienced people down there and City

Manager (**William Beck**) of Punta Gorda was very appreciative of everything we did," said Martin.

Martin was proud of his employees and their hard work. "They were named the "high-tech crew" by officials in Punta Gorda."

The City of Punta Gorda plans on having a get together when recovery efforts are complete, which may take at least a year. They have invited Martin, Michael and Walter back to celebrate.



Town public works employees wire a generator.