

Hurricane Irene... Being Prepared for the Unexpected

By: NJCM Board of Directors Member, Mayor Chuck Chiarello, Buena Vista Township

Hurricane Irene hit New Jersey on August 27, 28, and 29, 2011. Towns throughout New Jersey scrambled to make sure they were prepared for the “storm of the century”. Some of the public thought that this was all a lot of hype by the media, but Emergency Management Officials took the matter very seriously.

Buena Vista Township is 20 miles inland from the coast. We are 42.5 square miles in size with a population of 7,500 and are 90% located within the rural Pinelands region.

On Thursday, August 25th, Atlantic County called a meeting for all Elected Officials and Emergency Management Coordinators to tell us -- Hurricane Irene was going to be worse than expected.

That same evening Buena Vista held a special Public Safety Meeting inviting all fire and ambulance organizations, along with officials from our school district, neighboring fire companies, churches, and community groups. We spent about 90 minutes updating the group of 40 in attendance. We weren't sure that all the preparations would actually be necessary. On Friday, August 26th our Public Works Department began cleaning storm drains and tying down any loose items at our parks and facilities. A decision was made to open the Township Hall from 12 noon Saturday straight through 6 pm Sunday for emergency operations. Public Works Crews and Staff for the municipal building were scheduled.

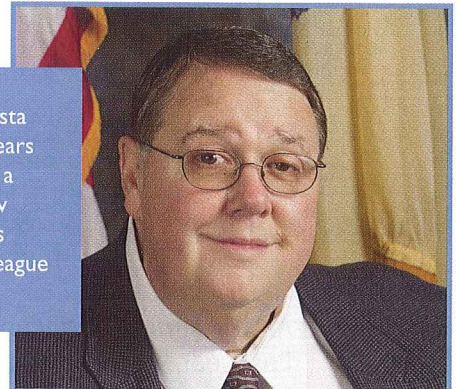
Atlantic County established an emergency shelter at the St. Augustine Prep School in the Richland section of Buena Vista. 650 people were housed there who were evacuated from the shore. By Friday night, the shelter was already overflowing. At 5 am on Saturday morning I was told a decision was made to open the Buena Regional Middle School. This

shelter would eventually house 250 more evacuees. Volunteers were sought from the community to help staff these facilities since the Red Cross was short handed. Members of the First Baptist Church of Richland helped staff the Buena Regional Middle School on short notice. Our Public Works Crews moved cots to the new site. The Abundant Living Church in our Newtonville section agreed to be a backup shelter for local residents (if it was needed). Our Newtonville Volunteer Fire Company set up generators at the church for emergency power. Members of the Church staffed their evacuation site. Our Public Works Department transferred cots from the Middle School to the Church.

Chuck Chiarello is Mayor of Buena Vista Township in Atlantic County for the past 17 years and has served in office for 20 years. Chuck is a member of the Board of Directors of the New Jersey Conference of Mayors since 1996 and is currently President of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities.

from our Public Works Director stating there was severe flooding at Cranberry Run, a 300 unit, 55+ Age Restricted Community about one mile from Township Hall. There is a real lake inside Cranberry Run, and I was told that the water was at the top of the hoods of our Township pick-up trucks. Every available fire, rescue, and ambulance had been summoned to evacuate the community. More than half of the residents had already previously headed out of the area.

All five of our Township fire companies and neighboring ones responded to Cranberry Run. Several had water rescue



By mid-day Saturday, the rain started, winds picked up, and most businesses were already closed. There were power outages in a large portion of our community along with trees down, flooding, road closures and as evening came, everything got worse. There was great uncertainty of where the storm would actually hit. That same week much of New Jersey felt its first earthquake – so nothing could be taken for granted. Winds hit Category One Hurricane strength and the night was not fit for man nor beast!

Township Hall remained a safe haven because of a large emergency power generator we had installed five years ago. At about 10:30 pm I told our Township Administrator that I regretted opening Township Hall and making people work during this storm when they could be safe in their homes. Moments later a call came

units including the Richland and Collings Lakes Volunteer Fire Companies. Township dump trucks and a high-wheel (army-type) vehicle also went in. Firemen walked the streets with water up to their chests pulling boats behind them, and I responded to the scene to see what I could do. It was raining torrentially and I was forced to stop when I drove into a wall of water. Cranberry Run normally has never had flood conditions like this. I was told by the Chief of our East Vineland Volunteer Fire Company that the residents remaining in Cranberry Run were refusing to leave. It was now around 12:30 am Sunday morning August 28th. Fire and rescue had only been able to get about 25 people to evacuate during the last couple of hours. I told the Chief that I was going to go back to Township Hall and would start phoning the residents to explain that

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this was serious business. Between 1 am and 2 am our Township Administrator and myself made 132 calls into Cranberry Run. We woke people up and insisted that they leave for their own safety. A short time later I was informed that our efforts were working. The St. Augustine Prep School lent us two school buses so that we could shuttle the evacuees from Cranberry Run to the Abundant Living Church. Volunteers had stood by at the Church for 12 hours with no one to serve. By 2:30 am I was informed that we had 102 residents now housed at the Church. Around 4:30 am on Sunday morning the Church told me they were short on food. Morning was coming and people would be hungry at the shelter. Since this was our own shelter we had to improvise in getting supplies to make the operation work. Public Works went to the kitchen at our main park and borrowed all the food that is kept there for our Summer Concerts Program. I started calling all the food stores and restaurants in the area. I had no luck at reaching anyone. I thought

about the owner of the 54 Diner (in Buena Vista) who lived about 12 miles away in Mays Landing. I had his cell number and I woke him up. He and his wife drove on dangerous highways to open the diner and prepare over 100 sandwiches and refreshments for those at the Abundant Living Church shelter. Public Works picked up the food and delivered it. By 8 am Sunday morning I was told that the residents of Cranberry Run were safe and happy. The storm had now passed over us and residents wanted to return home. By late Sunday afternoon many of the shelters were now near empty or closing.

Power was still out in a large portion of our Township and the Richland and East Vineland Volunteer Fire Companies began a pumping operation to remove water from Cranberry Run. On Monday August 29th a heavy duty pump was brought in by a contractor to help clear Cranberry Run.

Crews from Atlantic City Electric started getting power restored in many areas of the Township. They removed wires from trees that had fallen onto roadways. By Monday night, Atlantic City Electric crews went through Cranberry Run and restored electric even though the power lines are underground. It was still a dangerous situation.

At the writing of this article, the Township is preparing funding requests for FEMA to help recover our costs, as well as, for the fire companies and ambulance squads. In the end, being prepared for the "unexpected" paid big dividends because we had a well run evacuation effort. Buena Vista Township is still primarily a "volunteer community" and the efforts taken by all our organizations made a bad situation much better than it could have been. ♡

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PSE&G replaced more than a million feet of aging gas mains through this effort. In July, PSE&G obtained approval to expand its upgrades of electric and gas infrastructure on an accelerated basis – work that is expected to create hundreds of more jobs.

Improving Access to Energy Efficiency and Renewable Solar Energy

Energy efficiency is another area where PSE&G will be building upon successful efforts. In July, PSE&G also got a green light to invest an additional \$95 million in energy efficiency initiatives for hospitals,

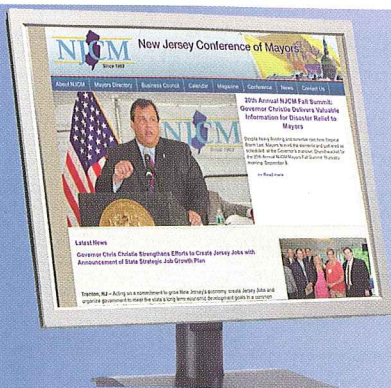
municipalities, non-profits and multi-family residences. This extends a \$166 million program approved in 2009 to provide energy audits and the direct installation of energy efficiency measures to customers who otherwise might not have been able to afford them.

To date, PSE&G's solar energy initiatives have created about 1,200 jobs, along with more than 60 solar megawatts. The company has placed into service 13 large-scale solar installations and mounted solar units on thousands of utility poles. So far, PSE&G has developed three of its

large solar installations on brownfields to help turn these former industrial sites green and productive again. Currently, a fourth solar farm is planned for a brownfield in Hackensack, continuing a winning record of giving new life to dormant pieces of land.

Proud Legacy, Enduring Impact

While keeping a close eye on a constantly changing energy scene, PSEG remains deeply involved in supporting New Jersey, as well as its customers and communities across the state. Proudly, PSEG is as strongly committed to New Jersey as ever. ♡



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