

# ...What they witnessed in Puerto Rico

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Sometimes they'd be met by local community leaders. But seldom did they come in contact with other rescue workers. In fact, residents often told them they were the first help to arrive — two or three weeks after the storm.

"What's being said about Puerto Rico doing just fine is not true," says Tammie Tally-Ingrao, a registered nurse who works at Kaiser Sunnybrook Medical Office. "People need to know what's going on so it does not get forgotten in December when people are still in the dark in Puerto Rico."

All over the island, OFNHP volunteers described traveling on roads strewn with downed trees, utility poles, and power lines. They saw houses without windows or roofs. Outside the houses there would be piles of ruined furniture and belongings. Inside the houses, walls and furnishings would be covered in black mold. [Moist conditions and tropical heat are ideal for mold, especially when cleanup is made more difficult by the lack of running water.]

Different areas were damaged in different ways. In Humacao, on the southeastern side of the island, Tally-Ingrao said more roofs were blown off. In the north around San Juan, most of the damage was caused by flooding. In the mountainous interior, houses of concrete construction remained standing, but community water sources were badly damaged.

Misty Richards, a registered nurse at Kaiser Sunnyside Medical Center, says her team visited one of the most damaged areas, Barrio Ingenio, half an hour west of San Juan. Barrio Ingenio was flooded when the government opened five gates of the La Plata Lake Dam to prevent it from collapsing from the weight of Maria's rains.

"These people, their homes are unlivable, but people are living there anyway, because what else can you do?" Richards said.

What disturbed volunteers most was that people didn't seem to be getting the help they need. The response of the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) was at times laughable, or worse.

Nowhere did they see FEMA distributing supplies,



Photo by Tammie Tally-Ingrao

**COMMUNITY ON THE EDGE:** Three weeks after the hurricane, much of Puerto Rico looks like this, with washed out roads, fallen trees, broken windows, damaged roofs, and downed power lines and cell phone towers.

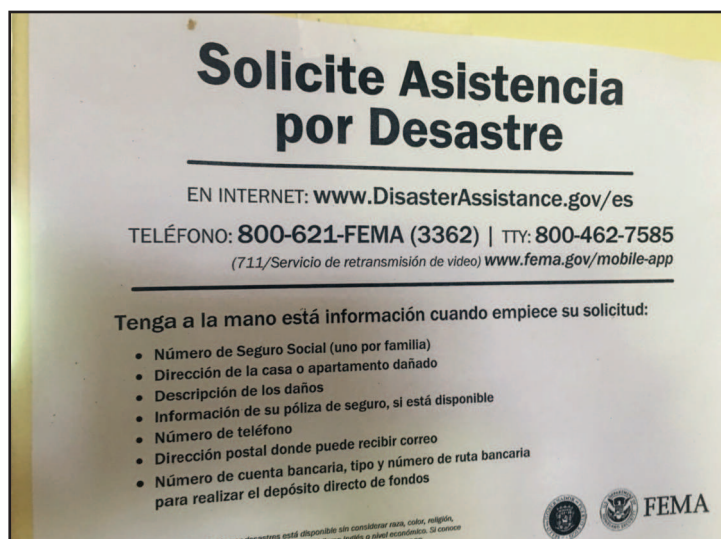


Photo by Misty Richards

**HURRICANE LEFT YOU WITHOUT POWER AND CELL SERVICE? BE SURE TO CALL OR EMAIL FEMA.** Oregon nurse union volunteers in Puerto Rico say they saw no evidence of FEMA distributing water, food, or other supplies on the hurricane-stricken island. But the agency did manage to put up signs like this one — listing the web address and phone number where you can get help filling out a 14-page form to request assistance.

but they did see FEMA fliers posted here and there, exhorting disaster victims to contact the agency by phone or online — on an island largely without phone service or electricity.

FEMA did set up intake stations to help disaster victims fill out a 14-page application for assistance. Tally-Ingrao said her team came upon one such center — set up in a parking lot in the town of Rio Grande. There they saw hundreds of people standing in line in the tropic heat, some for up to six hours. Several passed out from dehydration; FEMA wasn't providing food or water. They also met and helped a woman who had dislocated her shoulder two weeks before and had no medical care since then.

AFL-CIO volunteers cleared out of the sports complex and returned home Oct. 18. But the need continues. Witnessing the things she did, Richards said

she feels an obligation to shout from the rooftops that no, everything is not fine.

Nurses saw outbreaks of scabies and pinkeye while they were on the island. But worse may be still to come: With 1.8 million residents still drinking untreated water a month after the storm, waterborne illnesses could break out. Without electricity to power pumps, standing water will remain, breeding mosquitos. And continued difficulty accessing medicine will put others at risk.

"This is a health care crisis that did not need to happen," Richards said. "It's a man-made disaster. Maria came and went, but our government is making the situation worse by not putting enough resources into it... This is a token effort. It's like a kid who hands in a D-minus paper just so he can tell his parents he tried."

## COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

### Portland City workers take strike authorization vote

It's down to crunch time at the City of Portland, where nearly 1,000 union workers — affiliates of the District Council of Trades Unions (DCTU) — are voting on the City's "last, best and final" offer for a new contract. The DCTU declared impasse Sept. 27. As required by law, both sides exchanged last, best and final offers. The City showed some movement, union officials said, but not nearly enough, and they linked it to many unacceptable takeaways.

DCTU referred the offer, and a strike authorization, to the membership for a vote. Voting was held Oct. 12-19 (after this issue went to press), with a recommendation to reject the City's

offer and to authorize a strike.

The sides are scheduled to meet again with a mediator on Oct. 24.

The Northwest Oregon Labor Council at its Oct. 9 Executive Board meeting said if requested by DCTU, it will cite Portland City Council to show cause why it shouldn't be placed on the official Unfair/Do Not Patronize List.

## CORRECTION

Machinists Lodge 1005 represents workers at the City of Portland, and is an affiliate of the District Council of Trade Unions. An article in the Oct. 6 edition, "DCTU declares impasse at the City of Portland," reported the incorrect Machinists local.



Photo by Ryan Lund, courtesy UO LERC

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO LERC** Current and former staff, above, gathered Oct. 11 along with several hundred donors to celebrate 40 years since the founding of the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC). A program of the University of Oregon, LERC helps unions with training and research.

## UNION DEMOCRACY

### New union officers at Musicians Local 99

Members of American Federation of Musicians Local 99 approved new officers by acclamation at their Oct. 2 general membership meeting:

#### Executive Board (two-year terms)

- **Mary Ann Kaza**, a retired Oregon Symphony violinist and board member at the Metropolitan Youth Symphony
  - **John Nastos**, a saxophonist who performs at jazz clubs and the Oregon Symphony
  - **Lars Campbell**, a jazz and classical trombonist and music director at Clackamas Community College
  - **Jason Schooler**, a bassist in the Oregon Symphony
- Secretary-treasurer** (three-year term)
- **Mont Chris Hubbard**, a club and theater musician who performs piano and keyboard



Secretary-treasurer is one of the local's three top elected offices, one of which comes up for re-election each year.

The 565-member local represents orchestra musicians at Oregon Symphony, Portland Opera, and Oregon Ballet Theatre, as well as the Portland

Symphonic Choir, Portland Gay Men's Chorus, and the Portland Festival Symphony. It also has members who work under national contracts, such as local musicians

playing touring Broadway shows at Keller Auditorium, musicians working on national television productions like Grimm, and musicians who do contract work for ad agency Wieden and Kennedy.