

Helping hands for Harvey



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Eight of the nine Coast Guard personnel from Air Station Astoria sent to Texas to respond after Hurricane Harvey described their experiences Tuesday. It was the first hurricane duty for any of them.

Organized chaos held together by rigorous training

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

When Hurricane Harvey hit the Gulf Coast, the Coast Guard brought in personnel from around the country to help, stationing nearly 40 helicopters to perform rescues.

Sector Columbia River sent two air crews. After returning this week, they described a scene of organized chaos held together by rigorous training, camaraderie and a dedication to saving others.

The crews included pilots Lt. Cmdr. James Gibson, Lt. Cmdr. Kevin Rapp, Lt. Chip Haas and Lt. Kyle Murphy; rescue swimmers Petty Officer 2nd Class Jordan Gilbert and Petty Officer 2nd Class Dan Wilson; avionics electrical technicians Petty Officer 2nd Class Jake Cimbak, Petty Officer 3rd Class Allison Dowell and Petty Officer 3rd Class Tyler Hioe.

Water and rooftops

The two air crews from the Coast Guard deployed separately to Sector Mobile in Alabama and then on to Air Station Houston.

The first thing Hioe remembered was looking out a small window of a C-130. "That's when it hit me we were there, just seeing all the roofs and all the water through a small window," he said.

Cimbak and Hioe, part of the first local crew to arrive, immediately went to work inspecting the Coast Guard's MH-60 helicopters, all of which had faced heavy use and some of which were broken.

"It was just pouring rain sideways," Cimbak said. "It was really

'THE COAST GUARD IS A SMALL ORGANIZATION OF PEOPLE WHO ARE CONSTANTLY LEANING FORWARD TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN.'

Lt. Cmdr. Kevin Rapp
Sector Columbia River
Coast Guard

hot, and we were pretty much wet for two days straight."

The Coast Guardsmen worked long days, sleeping for several hours a night on creaky cots in an abandoned hangar with at least 50 other people.

Local crews more familiar with the landscape, much of which had been plunged into darkness by the hurricane and was strewn with power lines and other hidden obstacles, handled much of the operations during the darkest hours, Cimbak said.

'Just kind of ... chaos'

Murphy said arriving Coast Guardsmen were split up by spe-

cialties, with crews and flight plans often built from the ground up. "From the pilot's side, it was just kind of ... chaos," he said.

Dowell had been certified as a hoist operator several weeks before heading to Texas, where she performed her first missions hoisting real victims and worked with different rescue swimmers. But by that point all the rigorous, standardized training had made hoists part of her muscle memory, she said, and the communication among the differing air crew lineups seamless.

Typically, Coast Guard aviators don't bring cellphones on flights, Haas said. But with spotty communications and mass numbers of people calling in and using social media to reach out for help, flight and boat crews embraced smartphones, receiving coordinates and navigating to homes through cloud-computing apps like Google Maps.

"When the weather was at its worst, it was just the Coast Guard," said Wilson, who celebrated his 34th birthday rescuing people from flood waters. "They were getting the people in most need. And then once that weather had started clearing out, that's when we were getting a lot more resources from the other services as well, which were much needed, and that was just mass evacuation."

Aviators worked with local agencies on where to drop survivors off and with volunteer groups like the Cajun Navy to get people in less serious condition onto boats and to high ground.

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Carol G. Newman
An orange moon over Astoria.



Haze from fires limits outdoor activities

Officials urge common sense

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

Astoria residents woke up to a sprinkle of ash on their cars Tuesday morning, while people in Knappa reported seeing small flakes of ash falling throughout the day like snow.

No air quality warnings have been issued in Clatsop County yet, even as dozens of wildfires rage across the state, including a fire caused by fireworks in the Columbia River Gorge that broke out Saturday in the Eagle Creek area. That 20,000-acre fire has since spread toward Portland and jumped the river into Washington state.

However, officials recommend caution and common sense at the coast as ash and smoke haze from that fire descend on Clatsop County.

Schools limited outdoor activities Tuesday. At Astoria High School, all sports practices and other outdoor activities were moved inside. Staff anticipated making a similar decision today, but wouldn't know for sure until the afternoon. A cross-country meet in Tualatin that Astoria students expected to attend was canceled

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Fire or volcano? Oregon blaze sparks eruption comparisons.

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City council backs child care center

Opponents have 21 days to appeal decision

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

An education and child care center slated to move into a building on Port of Astoria property last month is in limbo.

The Astoria City Council voted 4-1 Tuesday night to uphold a Planning Commission decision to allow Shooting Stars Child Development Center to operate out of a building on Gateway Avenue, shooting down an appeal by Chris Connaway, president of the local long-

shore union chapter.

Connaway had argued that the center is a multi-use facility and should be considered under more stringent conditions outlined in the city's development code. He and others involved in the hearing now have 21 days to appeal the City Council's decision to the state Land Use Board of Appeals.

Until the appeals process is over, Denise Giliga, owner of Shooting Stars, says the center is stuck between its current location at St. Mary Star of the Sea on Grand Avenue and the new location on Gateway. The center's lease with the Star of the Sea church ends Sept. 30.

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Immigrants shocked by DACA decision

Some hopeful Congress will save program

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

Natalia Ponce May was working in a warrant at the Home Depot in Warrenton when she received a disturbing text from a friend Tuesday morning.

President Donald Trump had just announced his intention to dismantle a federal program that allows undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children to apply for two-year,

renewable legal status and employment.

A single mother of two young daughters who earned her GED earlier this year and plans to begin classes at Clatsop Community College later this month, Ponce May began to cry.

"I'm still, like, in shock with it," she said. "I'm just very scared. I think everyone is."

Ponce May is one of several hundred thousand people living in the U.S. who have applied for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a program former President Barack Obama established through a 2012 executive

order.

"I was hopeful this was one of the programs that would be spared," said Jorge Gutierrez, the executive director of the Lower Columbia Hispanic Council. "I was a little bit shocked."

Ponce May, 28, who emigrated from Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula at age 15, applied for the program five years ago. Her application is still pending, and Tuesday's announcement has pushed her further into limbo. Frightened, she called her lawyer as soon as she took her first break for the day.

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Brian Davies/The Register-Guard

Protesters assemble in the Wayne Free Speech Plaza in downtown Eugene Tuesday. The gathering was intended to express solidarity against the Trump administration's plan to end the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which shielded young undocumented immigrants from deportation.

