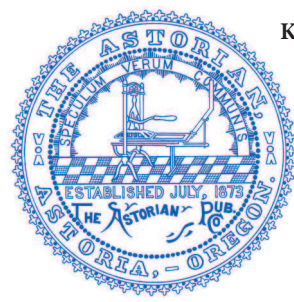


# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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## OUR VIEW

# There will be another big one

It is hard to believe that 10 years have passed since the North Coast was hit by the Great Coastal Gale.

Our anniversary coverage in The Daily Astorian today brings back memories for those of us who endured and survived.

Nearly constant rain accompanied by winds gusting up to 147 mph hit the region in December 2007, with felled power lines and trees, widespread and lengthy electricity outages and considerable disruption.

While we remember the stories of courage and fortitude of neighbors helping neighbors, it is timely to ponder what we learned from the experience.

The biggest takeaway can be summed up in two sentences:

- Don't expect immediate outside help
- Be prepared for next time

The very nature of our location on the coast puts us amid the splendid natural beauty of the confluence of the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean. Of course, this also means that there are only four ways to get here by road.

The disruption in flood-prone Tillamook County and the swath of felled timber in Pacific and Wahkiakum counties in Washington state meant the U.S. Highway 101 access route north or south was not an option, especially with dangerously high winds buffeting the Astoria Bridge and Washington Highway 4 covered in tree limbs all the way east to Longview.

U.S. Highways 30 and 26, our usual east-west lifelines inland to the Willamette Valley, were blocked to regular traffic for days because trees falling on power lines made passage dangerous and frequently impossible.

In the aftermath of the storm, some North Coast leaders were critical of the apparent lack of any early response from the state of Oregon. But frankly, with the access problems to our area, and the devastating flooding in Vernonia and elsewhere, it was always unlikely we would receive prompt aid.

That meant we had to cope on our own.

And cope we did.

Police and firefighters throughout our community worked long hours ensuring residents' safety. Our cities and Clatsop County government activated emergency coordinating centers to address priorities. Camp Rilea proved an important resource. Radio stations and this newspaper worked long and late to provide residents with the most accurate information. Church leaders and private citizens rallied in a most good-neighborly manner to provide shelter and food. At our two county hospitals, Columbia Memorial and Providence Seaside, nursing staff stayed on duty for days to care for the most vulnerable among us.

Agencies that contributed greatly to easing our pain included the Pacific Power linemen, the Clatsop County road crews, and the Oregon Department of Transportation personnel who literally risked their lives to help clear the highways and work to turn the electricity back on.

The Coast Guard played a key role, too, as it does year-round, although some resources were diverted inland to Centralia and Chehalis, where brave helicopter crews rescued residents from the rooftops of their homes as the floodwaters rose.

As we tip our hats to all those who pitched in, we need to call upon that trusty Boy Scout motto once again with all seriousness.

We must be prepared for the next weather-related natural disaster. The very nature of where we live makes some sort of repeat incident inevitable. It may be a similar prolonged storm with hurricane-force gusts. Or, it may be a tsunami from a quake off our Pacific Coast. The exact type of incident may vary, but planning our response should not.

Drills, preparedness discussions and budgeting government money for proper emergency responses need to continue to make sure we are ready. This spending of our limited tax dollars is not a luxury.

And private citizens should remember they will survive more easily with a plan, rather than improvising when disaster hits.

Parents should talk with their children about what to do in the event of an emergency, especially the need to avoid taking risks. Every family should put together a basic survival kit, including flashlights, batteries, drinking water, blankets and nonperishable food stocks. This should be updated on a regular basis — for example, replacing batteries and food items with newer items. When weather forecasts are dire, fueling family vehicles and checking tires is an excellent strategy, because once the power goes out, gas station pumps cease normal operations.

We are optimistic that when the next big storm hits, we will all cope much better than last time. We have learned much. And some changes, including the tree clearance program and widening along Highway 30, and some additional work on Highway 26, should make east-west access somewhat better.

But we are still vulnerable.

The flip side of living in this most gorgeous part of the United States makes the threat of more severe weather a constant.

We can cope best if we are prepared.

STAR TRIBUNE  
SACK



# A tale of two storms

By JIM VAN NOSTRAND  
*The Daily Astorian*

Big storms can define our lives, and turn them upside down.

It has been fascinating for me to look at the memories from our readers of the Great Coastal Gale of 2007, recounted in a special section of today's newspaper. Everyone had their own experience, their own story to tell.

Editing those stories brought back memories for me, as well — but of a different disaster, two years earlier and 2,700 miles away.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina blasted the Gulf Coast with 120-mph winds, 55-foot sea waves and a storm surge averaging 30 feet. Low-lying coastal communities were completely devastated. It left 238 people dead and 67 missing in Mississippi, with 65,000 homes and businesses destroyed and an estimated \$125 billion in damages.

The Biloxi Sun Herald, a Knight Ridder newspaper, lay directly in the hurricane's path. I was a web editor for Knight Ridder's Washington Bureau at the time. When the lights went out in Mississippi, I joined scores of the company's journalists around the country who mobilized to help our colleagues in their hour of need.

Digital editors based in several different time zones set up a news desk online to tell the world what was going on. The Sun Herald staff worked on laptops powered by an emergency generator. They transmitted the data via a sketchy satellite phone connection and the assistance of a friendly trucker, who ferried computer disks east on Highway 10 to Mobile, Alabama. We printed the newspaper at the Ledger-Enquirer in Columbus, Georgia, and trucked it back to Biloxi, never missing a day of publication.

As described by Stan Tiner, the Sun Herald's editor at the time, the internet "came of age" for his newspaper during that crisis. Social media was in its infancy — Facebook was only a year old, and Twitter would not be born until the following year. The digital desk posted updates every half hour around the clock for weeks. We used online bulletin boards for readers around the world to inquire about their loved ones. We provided tools for readers to upload photos of their homes, in too many cases reduced to concrete slab foundations. The newspaper's sports editor became a blogger, posting "news you can use" updates such as which bridges were out and where the emergency crews were working at any given time.

Then, as now, advance planning is the key to dealing with a calamity of that magnitude. Knight Ridder had years of experience dealing with disasters befalling its newspapers, from the 1997 Red River flood in North Dakota that inundated the Grand Forks Herald

to Hurricane Andrew in 1992 at the Miami Herald in Florida. The company sent a team to Biloxi with food, water, fuel, clothing, cash and emergency equipment, including a portable cellphone tower. RVs were provided as sleeping quarters for staffers who'd lost their homes. The makeshift encampment in the newspaper's parking lot was dubbed "Camp Hope." Other Knight Ridder newspapers sent reporters and photographers to spell the exhausted staff.

The limited resources were carefully managed, Tiner recalled. If a reporter needed to drive to a neighboring town to cover a story, the editors would calculate the required mileage for a Honda Accord and hand-crank the exact amount of gasoline needed from a portable pump.

Many of the tales about how communities in Mississippi, Oregon and Washington state came together and coped with their respective disasters are remarkably similar. In Biloxi, for example, residents headed to the end of the Bay St. Louis Bridge to catch faint cellphone signals. In Seaside, everyone gathered at the Cove to do the same thing.

In all the communities, neighbors broke bread together in the streets, sharing the food from their melting freezers and pooling their fuel. First responders struggled to deal with unprecedented damage and overcame obstacles they never imagined they'd have to confront. People had to figure out how to live their lives without electricity, for several days here and up to several weeks in Mississippi.

I was never sent to the hurricane zone, and did not have to endure those privations. I did my small part from the comfort of an office in Washington, D.C. To this day I feel pangs of guilt about that. I will always remember the sacrifices made by the good folks at the Sun Herald, who put out a newspaper every day and worked hard to serve their readers in the face of adversity. Many lost their homes and everything they owned to the hurricane — some lost relatives — and they continued to do their jobs. It was their finest hour.

By all accounts, the staff here at The Daily Astorian overcame long odds in 2007, though without the assistance of a corporate parent with deep pockets and expertise. They figured it out on the fly, navigating treacherous roads and downed trees and power lines, among other obstacles. They managed to miss only one day of publication.

I feel a sense of comfort. I work with a battle-tested staff who has done this kind of thing before. I live in a community that came together in such a positive way.

Now it's time to make sure we're ready for the next "big one," whether a storm or a tsunami.

*Jim Van Nostrand is editor of The Daily Astorian.*



NASA  
A satellite view of Hurricane Katrina.

