



Photo courtesy of Fire Management.  
Sacred Heart Suppah Camp Crew members, helping hurricane relief effort: Waylon Heath, Frank Sahme, Richard Tewee, Carol Lawrence, Sacred Heart Suppah, Curtis Stacona, Bobby Eagleheart, Timothy Kalama and Charles Kalama (from left).

## Collins recounts experience working with victims of hurricane

By Brian Mortensen  
Spilyay Tymoo

While many of the people affected by Hurricane Katrina harbored complaints at those charged with rescuing them, Nancy Collins met none of them.

Collins, the sanitation manager for the Warm Springs Public Works Department, was deployed to southern Mississippi as part of her duty as a commissioned officer for the U.S. Public Health Service Sept. 3.

Collins said officers with the public health services are often deployed for "readiness for national emergencies."

"They deploy based on a rotation basis, and my rotation was up," she said. Collins has been with the Public Health Service since August 1991, and this was the first time she had ever been deployed.

She received the call Thurs., Sept. 1, when Katrina was threatening the Gulf Coast. She had originally been summoned to Mississippi the following day but she was allowed an extra day to prepare.

When she called from a cell phone for a telephone interview for this story, Collins was in Gulfport, Miss., part of an area on the Mississippi coastline she assisted that stretched west to Bay St. Louis, about one hour north of New Orleans.

Collins said she did not go to New Orleans during her two-week stint in the south.

A large part of her duty was assessing relief centers and making certain they were sanitary, "and making sure they were going the first couple of days," she said.

She also swept through neighborhoods looking for people who may have been stranded and unable to get necessities like prescription refills.

Collins described the hurricane damage as "hit and miss," with some houses leveled by the strong winds and others sustaining little or even no damage, even among neighboring houses.

"I'm surprised," she said. "I thought it'd be all or nothing." Instead, she said, "Like

a tornado, it was hit-and-miss."

The Mississippi coastline was hit with 30-foot waves that forced people on the shoreline to climb to the tops of their houses, just as on the news footage of refugees in New Orleans.

"When it hit, people went up to their attics, and that's how they survived," she said.

When the high water was in the streets and enveloping the neighborhoods, some took to swimming between the houses if they had to.

Collins described some people as rolling with the waves, scraping themselves on fences as the water leveled out, allowing them to reach the next rooftop when the waves crested.

The attitude of the people she has encountered in the Gulfport-Bay St. Louis area was surprisingly friendly and even optimistic. Some of these included people who had lost their houses in the storm, she said.

"People have been very appreciative," she said. "A lot of what you hear has not been very nice, but the people I've met here have been very nice. Everybody that we have talked to has thanked us for being here."

She said, "I know people who lost everything. And they said it was God's way of providing them with a better place to live. People are surprisingly optimistic."

They started cleaning up, and if they didn't have anything to clean up, they were looking for place to move to."

Some found refuge outside of the area, but would come back to clean up or repair their houses.

"I saw people living in tents among the sticks and the rubble," she said. "Some people weren't leaving until the city tells them they have to," she said. "I saw people out mowing the lawn."

Now almost two weeks after Katrina tread her dangerous path, communities in the Deep South are just getting their water systems back online. Some systems may be otherwise functional but are possibly contaminated by sewer leaks. Gulfport residents, in particular, were forced to use bottled water as recently as last week, Collins said.

Collins is one of 34 environ-

mental health officers stationed along the Mississippi coast. While she was there, news from New Orleans, and about the evacuation and unrest left behind, was scarce. She said local television stations weren't able to broadcast until Sunday, "although we know they're not making people evacuate anymore, and they're not pumping water out as fast as they thought they'd be able to," she said.

Cell phone service has been serviceable in some places and not in others. On the coast, it had been functioning, but has only recently been working in Gulfport, she said. The health officers were equipped, though, with satellite telephones and walkie-talkies.

Out on the street, if people appear otherwise healthy, Collins said she's been handing out sunscreen, as temperatures are still in the 90s and humid there. She has also been handing out insect repellent and larvicide.

Doctors are on hand at the relief centers, and a lot of people have complained of salt-water rashes, where the floodwater stayed in contact on their feet and legs.

The national disaster management system proved to be just as overloaded to the residents in coastal Mississippi, as well.

"One of the other problems is that FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) gives people a number to call or go on-line to make claims," she said. "Most people don't have cell phone service, and they certainly don't have computers. And when they have been able to call, they've gotten a voice-mail message. It's been frustrating for people."

Despite the eye-opening sights of houses literally lifted off their foundations and standing in the middle of the street, and boats blown onto the tops of vans, and the stress of caring for people whose lives have been shaken, Collins said she's fared well.

"They make sure you have plenty of water and sunscreen," she said.

Toys-Tools-Housewares-Clothing-Crafts-Gifts-

# The Outpost

Your Bargain Connection

All New All The Time!

717 S.W. 5th St Madras Or

**Just in at the Outpost!**

**Socks for the family.....** 

**Leather Jackets.....**

**Embroidered Caps \$5.00** 

**-New Shipment of-**

 **Tools** 

**now 20% off**

<http://www.theoutpoststore.com/>

Toys-Tools-Housewares-Clothing-Crafts-Gifts-

## Cliff's Repair & Auto Sales

**24-Hour Towing - 475-6618**

Free towing w/engine or trans replacement from Madras & Warm Springs area

### Gas Savers



**91 Ford Explorer**  
4x4

**\$3,295**



**94 Jeep Grand Cherokee**  
4x4

**\$3,295**

330 S.W. Culver Hwy.  
Madras, OR 97741

**475-6618**