

Wednesday's

Editorials, Columns & Letters

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Paper 'n Ink... a disaster movie...for real

By Lynn Brisendine
As you read this, it has been a full week since the hurricane named Sandy tore up the Atlantic seaboard.

Now several days after the "one hundred year" storm raked across much of the Northeast, some people continue to live without power. Emergency electric crews from all across the nation, several men and trucks made the 1,800 mile one way trip from Amarillo, are working back east.

Reporters and weathermen are comparing this event with the terrible Katrina that devastated New Orleans, much of Louisiana and the Mississippi coast.

While the storms were different in many ways, Katrina varied from a rating of five to three as it headed north across the warm Gulf of Mexico. Sandy, the Atlantic maelstrom, ramped up to a two on the five scale, and was estimated to be a strong one when it actually hit New Jersey and lower New York.

New Orleans, a city which is below sea level in many places, was overwhelmed when huge rains took out levees around the city and allowed waters from Lake Ponchartrain to engulf the city.

We all know it was a mess. Thousands of poor people struggled for months, some are still affected by this weather terror of 2005.

New Orleans has not completely recovered. Many residents who fled the storm and its aftermath never returned. Still, the Corps of Engineers rebuilt the levees and installed new facilities costing billions of dollars to try and keep the city dry if another huge storm should hit.

And hit another huge storm surely will. Just as, sooner or later, another one of these super storms will hit where Sandy demolished billions of dollars more of public and private properties.

While the storm took its toll, it really was no surprise. Weather experts had been tracking the tropical depression for weeks. And they predicted almost to a pinpoint where this mass of wind, rain and destruction would make a turn and come ashore.

Predictions were also proved true for some who had been labeled crack pots and alarmists by others who doubted global warming. These non-scientists who make a living being pundits who preach radicalism with every breath have to be rethinking their inaccurate commentary.

New York City, at least a lot of it, was flooded in some areas by feet of rain and wind driven sea water. The "crackpots" who have warned for years about the rising ocean levels have been vindicated to some extent.

Like New Orleans, New York City will see some unique, innovative and certainly expensive measures taken to try and protect the city from another tropical mass.

Bigger sea walls are to be constructed. Tunnel entrances and exits will be refitted as new technology using huge inflatable bladders to seal them are being considered.

Larger and faster pumps will be installed and electric equipment will be built higher from the ground and refigured to forestall shorting out during these storms.

Even new methods of rodent control will be needed. Nests of rats hidden among the subway tunnels networking below the city have been disturbed and they are moving to the surface. The theory is that these animals have been contained to some degree in isolated conditions. Now they will breed with other colonies and spread disease. These vermin carry disease, foul living quarters and contaminate food supplies. Some say these unwanted guests will experience a population explosion as they exploit new territories.

Oceanographers have been telling anyone who would listen that water levels are rising. They said that these levels had come up from one to one and half inches over the last century. No worries, it would seem. But, apparently, that amount of additional water makes all the difference in a city built at the water's edge. These same experts are telling us that the seas will rise even faster over the next decades, making the conditions for flooding worse.

All of this for the huge city, while other areas will also see changes. Not much will be the same for people who have grown up going to the amusement parks built on peers in several areas. Those facilities have been decimated. Much of the infrastructure lays rusting in sea water as the peers were destroyed and the sand in huge swaths moved in covering miles of streets and highways inland.

Just dealing with the sand will be monumental. Front end loaders can't just scoop it up and move it back. At least not until it has been sifted and broken glass, nails and other storm hurled shrapnel is removed.

All of this is problematic, but the residents of New Jersey and much of NYC are suffering their own losses as they have lost housing, wages and normal is no more.

The people who live in that area certainly weren't surprised. News bulletins had been ongoing, many every hour, for more than a week. And the first question is, why didn't they move out of the way and take other precautions to prepare? The truth is, too many had no other place to go and no money to fund such a move. These people are now stranded in neighborhoods with no power, no heat, no running water and homes with major damage.

Our leaders have to figure out better ways of handling these natural disasters.

State Capital Highlights

Compiled by Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association



Officials say women's health program is ready...

AUSTIN — Dr. Kyle Janek, chief of the state Health and Human Services agency, and Gov. Rick Perry on Oct. 31 announced a new state-funded Texas Women's Health Program is ready to step in and deliver services to low-income women "if Washington cuts off funding to the Medicaid program."

"We've got the state program ready to stand up at any time, and that transition would be seamless for patients and their doctors," Janek said.

Since 2007, the program has been funded primarily with federal Medicaid dollars. The state plans to reject billions in Medicaid dollars in order to cut off funding to organizations affiliated with abortion providers in accordance with a state law passed in 2011.

Perry said that any lawsuit filed to challenge the state's version of the women's health program would "kill the program, and would be responsible for denying these important health services to the low-income women of Texas."

Meanwhile, a temporary injunction put in effect by an Austin state district court on Oct. 26 prevents the state from following through on its "affiliate ban rule" until Nov. 8, when oral arguments in a case brought by Planned Parenthood will be heard.

Planned Parenthood called the injunction "a small victory for the approximately 50,000 Texas women who rely on Planned Parenthood for care through the Women's Health Program, which includes lifesaving breast and cervical cancer screenings, birth control, and testing for sexually transmitted infections."

Windstorm concerns aired

Hurricane Sandy's recent ravage of the eastern seaboard reminds Texans of Hurricanes Rita, Katrina, Dolly, Ike, Alicia

and others. Before and after mayhem hits, questions over who pays and who is responsible for what inevitably arise.

On Nov. 1, the Joint Committee on Oversight Board of Windstorm Insurance met at the Capitol, hearing testimony from the Texas Windstorm Insurance Association ("TWIA"), the Texas Public Finance Authority, the Texas Department of Insurance and the State Auditor's Office.

A few of many topics addressed were TWIA's reserve fund, high administration costs, bookkeeping issues, the danger storms pose to coastal counties, slowness and other problems with recovery efforts, and how some coastal property owners struggle to pay high premiums.

TWIA was established by legislative mandate to provide wind and hail insurance for Texas Gulf Coast property owners in the event of catastrophic loss. "We provide 'basic' coverage unavailable in traditional markets for consumers who might otherwise be left uninsured," TWIA's literature states.

Drought proclamation
Gov. Perry on Nov. 2 renewed his July 5, 2011, proclamation certifying that exceptional drought conditions pose a threat of imminent disaster in specified counties in Texas.

The renewed proclamation, good for 30 days, applies to 121 of the state's 254 counties.

Disaster relief to counties population under 200,000 and cities under 50,000 that have suffered from severe drought and wildfire may come in the form of federal aid through the Community Development Block Grant Program.

For example, on Oct. 31, Texas Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples announced the award of \$1.4 million in federal disaster relief grants to governmental bodies that applied and

met the criteria: Bastrop County and the cities of Florence, Llano and Seymour.

Manufacturing panel forms

House Speaker Joe Straus on Oct. 22 created the Interim Committee on Manufacturing, a panel of 15 state House members tasked with recommending ways the Legislature can strengthen the manufacturing sector in Texas.

Straus said manufacturing is a \$192 billion industry in Texas, accounting for 15 percent of the gross state product, adding that more than 800,000 Texans work in manufacturing.

Straus appointed Rep. Jim Murphy, R-Houston, as chair of the committee and Rep. Eddie Rodriguez, D-Austin, as vice chair.

TEA calls for applicants

Texas Education Agency last week posted notice that it is seeking qualified attorneys to act as independent hearing examiners in local school district employment hearings.

Examiners preside over hearings involving nonrenewal or termination of educator employment contracts and issue recommendations for a school district's board of trustees to consider. Deadline for filing application is 5 p.m. Dec. 3.

F1 racing

On Nov. 1, the governor participated in a public relations event to promote Formula 1 Grand Prix automobile racing at the Circuit of the Americas track near Austin, where racing events will take place Nov. 16-18.

"The U.S. Grand Prix will bring 1.2 million visitors to Central Texas," Perry said, "and is an opportunity to demonstrate to people from around the world everything we have to offer in the Lone Star State as a tourism destination, and as a place to live and work."

Thinking in Type ...

By Brian Brisendine

Veterans Day almost always inspires reporters to sit down with a few men or women each year and dictate their recollections of times gone by.

The television pieces usually are set to the trumpeted tune of Taps and almost always feature at least one serene shot of Arlington National Cemetery or some other solemn place.

And the clippings found in newspapers can be moving and entertaining stories narrated by the brave men and women who have served at some point in their lives.

It was in one of these Veterans Day stories I read this week, that I came across some sobering news.

I consider myself a history buff and I would also like to think pretty well informed on some topics.

On the topic at hand, I have studied World War II in depth and listened to the tales of many veterans while writing stories like the ones previously mentioned.

I also love to hear the tales brought home by my Granddaddy, who saw action with his T-Patch infantry unit for several years on foreign soil.

It had not occurred to me though, how very little I know about the first world war.

It was called at the time "the war to end all wars." Unfortunately we know this to be false.

But it was a world-changing conflagration that introduced us to nightmarish new fighting techniques.

They fought much of the war in trenches, constantly digging toward and around each other and from those miserable holes in the ground, they witnessed unimaginable bloodshed.

The ones lucky enough to come home survived chemical weapons and bayonet charges. The mobilization of American men was unprecedented

and massive even by today's standards.

Two million American GIs were deployed to France at a time when the United States population was less than 1/3 what it is today.

In all, almost 120,000 American boys were killed, either in battle or by one of history's worst recorded outbreaks of the Spanish Flu.

The wounded were nearly double that number.

When it was over, they came home quietly — without the massive celebrations and ticker-tape parades seen at the conclusion of WWII.

There were no veterans benefits and they simply went on with their lives.

They sired and reared what is now known as "The Greatest Generation" which has largely come to overshadow them in the annals of history.

But the sobering part of the story I read this week is the number of WWI veterans still living.

That number — zero. The story noted that this Veterans Days, November 11, 2012, will be the first ever observed without a World War I veteran alive to be honored.

It's astounding really. Of the 4.7 million men who served their country in the first world war — "the war to end all wars" — for the first

time, none remain.

The last surviving WWI veteran in the world was Florence Green, Women's Royal Air Force (UK). She passed in her sleep at the age of 110 earlier this year.

It's amazing to think about the lives they have lived.

They were born under a United States flag that had 45 stars.

They have witnessed the first cars, airplanes, radios, motion pictures, televisions, computers, space travel, antibiotics and other medical advances that would have seemed like science fiction in their childhoods and so much more.

In their lifetime, 20 presidents have led the nation through seven wars.

They were the "Doughboys" — once hardened warriors and eventually some of the world's oldest residents -- now gone.

Their war ceased with an armistice 94 years ago this weekend when major hostilities of World War I were formally ended at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918.

These men and women and millions of other veterans, young and old, living and dead, male and female, who have and who continue to defend our homeland deserve the thanks of a grateful nation. I think they have it.

Letter to the Editor

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