

# BULLSEYE: COUNTY RECOVERING FROM KATE

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FIGURES AREN'T FIRM, BUT SOME SAY CLEAN-UP WILL COST GADSDEN MILLIONS

She came, she went, and the first late-season hurricane to inflict serious damage in this area since the 1940's left Gadsden Countians stunned by her strength and wondering when life will be normal again.

Hurricane Kate struck Thursday night, with a center "much closer" to Gadsden County than it was even to Leon County, which also received a serious battering from the storm, according to Jack Morton of the National Weather Service.

Gadsden got it "worse than several places around here did," said Morton, adding that between the hours of 6:00PM and 10:00PM the night of the storm, the eye had been located 30 miles northwest of Tallahassee.

He explained that the strongest weather is experienced "to the right side of the eye" so that if the eye – a period of calm winds and fair weather – passes through an area, that area "gets blasted before the eye gets there, and then it boots you again."

Winds were officially measured in Tallahassee at 68 miles per hour, and unofficially at 70 plus miles per hour, Morton said.

Another weather service spokesman, Fred Cramer, said that tornadoes and thunderstorms caused still higher downburst winds. One tornado was reported near Havana, and several near Calhoun County, he said.

"There have been hurricanes that came ashore even further inland than Tallahassee, with winds more than 100 miles per hour," Cramer said, but he added that damage to this area was more visible than it might be some places because of the number of trees here.

Everywhere in Quincy Friday morning, it was the same story: Massive trees blocking road, leaning on houses or power lines, fallen inside houses. All day, residents could be seen hauling loose limbs and debris to curbsides, and by nightfall nearly every right of way showed some sign of the unwelcome Kate's visit the night before.

Power lines were down everywhere, and a service station run by an independent generator had blocks of cars lined up bumper to bumper along Jefferson Street, waiting for gas.

By late afternoon Friday, several grocery stores and fast food places were open, and all weekend these places have been packed with residents unable to cook their own food due to the unavailability of power.

“We lost our lights and water Thursday afternoon,” one woman waiting in a long line at McDonalds told another customer. “I can live without lights, but water...”

A few feet away, another Gadsden resident mentioned an oak tree which had fallen inside a bedroom in her house, and a \$4,000 roof job now totally demolished.

These stories weren't unusual; by Saturday it seemed that the question posed by friends to other friends was not if they'd gotten damage, but how much damage they'd received.

George Galloway of Talquin Electric Cooperative said power had been restored to some county residents by afternoon Friday. He hoped most residents would have at least some power by Saturday. By Monday, “about 65 percent” of Talquin's customers had full power, he said.

“We're still concentrating on the main circuits,” Galloway said. “We want to get them back on, then we'll go to the individual taps.” He added that the company is placing special emphasis on lines that feed the water system.

Talquin called in 175 crewmen from as far away as Tennessee to help with power problems that ranged from clearing fallen trees from lines to rebuilding new lines, resetting fuses, and resetting poles.

He said there hadn't been any problems at all yet with injuries or fatalities associated with power lines. However, “We're cautioning people to stay clear of any lines on the ground,” Galloway said. “They need to be very careful and not get too close to any line on the ground. The lines may be hot, and they may not be, but people had better assume that they are.”

Galloway said he estimated that Talquin will have spent more than \$4 million to remedy the power situation by the time it's all over.

And, he added, “It's going to be a long time before we get everything back just the way it was before the hurricane.”

Quincy City Manager Buddy Johnson was in the field Monday and could not be reached for comment about how the city has dealt with the power outages.

One of the worst-hit areas in Quincy was the Burma Heights residential subdivision, where power lines were down in multitudes at several intersections and crossings along winding streets, especially near Ninth Street and Forest Drive. Bellamy Street and Magnolia Drive also appeared badly battered, along with portions of Eleventh Street. Uprooted trees were everywhere, leaning against houses or across otherwise perfect lawns. On Eleventh Street, several huge trees had fallen across the railroad tracts.

A few residents had trees fall not only across, but also inside of their houses. One such resident was Francis McCall, branch manager at Security First Federal, who had just moved with his wife Carolyn and two children into a home on Ninth Street.

Rick McCaskill of Thomas Motor Cars, lives at 328 North Eleventh Street with “I bet, the biggest tree in Quincy down in our back cars.”

“We can’t find a chain saw big enough to cut it,” he added.

He said he sustained damage to the front of his house, and had one wall caved in, along with part of the ceiling.

“Francis (McCall) got it a lot worse than I did,” McCaskill said. But he added that Buck Register of Lake Talquin Road had more damage than anybody else around here that he knew of.

Register’s resident “really looks like a bomb went off around it, with pine trees lined up just like matchsticks,” McCaskill said. “That’s the first thing anybody says, that I’ve talked to, ‘Have you seen Buck Register’s house?’”

Neither Register nor McCall could be reached for comment.

County librarian Charles Parker showed up at the city public safety department Friday night to ask if police needed any additional help with clean up the following day.

He said he’d never been through a ‘cane like Kate before. About town during the day, “The attitude seems to be, people are pulling together,” Parker said.

In the county, Lanier Road in Havana was had-hit by what appeared to be a twister. A neighborhood crew of approximately eight men worked with two tractors and chainsaws to make the road passable and cut paths of access to individual homes.

Greensboro, like other areas in the county, showed heavy tree damage in some places, while others went apparently untouched. Many old tobacco barns and equipment sheds on State Road 12 between Quincy and Greensboro were wiped out, but others remained standing.

A trailer in Lodge Trailer Park in Quincy and one in Greensboro were demolished.

East Havana also reportedly received heavy storm damage, but “the further west you go, the less damage,” one official said.

Despite obviously serious property damage in Gadsden County, no fatalities or serious injuries have been associated with the hurricane.

“We ran all night, but had no serious injuries,” said emergency medical technician Carol Gore with the Gadsden County Ambulance Service. Most of the calls answered during the night of the hurricane were associated with car accidents, but no one seemed to be seriously hurt.

“We had some people in with brush in their eyes, cuts from trying to clean up their houses – that kind do thing,” said Christy Harrison, director of nursing at Gadsden Memorial Hospital. She added that Gadsden Memorial Hospital had handled “the tail end of the emergency shelter” plans, which involved providing rooms to six evacuees who stayed in Quincy when Carter-Parramore Jr High School, used as an American Red Cross Shelter Thursday night, was shut down Friday after most everyone else had left.

Ambulance Service Director Tommy Baker said he had been at Carter Parramore Jr High School early Thursday evening, when there were only about 30 people present.

“Then when the weather got really ad, all of a sudden there were about 400 people,” he said. “It was unreal. I couldn’t believe it. They were in the cafeteria, as many as could sit down there, and in the gym.”

There was no electricity, and a few emergency lights.

“It wasn’t so bad after they got settled,” Baker said. “But it was really confusing at first.”

He said the ambulance service sent one truck to Liberty County Thursday night. The truck was supposed to return that night, but was kept from returning by blocked roads and had driving conditions.

“They couldn’t get through,” Baker said. He said the crew manning the truck used in Liberty County had reported that “Liberty County wasn’t even really hurt” by the hurricane.

“They apparently had minor damage compared to us.” He said.

American Red Cross Director Margaret Johnson noted that Greensboro’s elementary and high schools had also been used as American Red Cross shelters, housing local people.

The shelters were opened Wednesday night at 10:00PM, but only about 30 people from outlying counties were using the shelters – until around 5:30PM Thursday evening,

when Carter Parramore Jr High School was swamped with “close to 500 people,” Johnson said.

She said home economics extension agent Shirley Clark and Carter Parramore nutritionist Dolly Rittman helped out by planning for and serving food to the evacuees.

“It was like feeding 5,000,” Johnson said. Some of the chicken and other food supplied to storm refuges was supplied by the school board, some by Higdon IGA. But donations so far have been in the area of volunteer work, she said. The American Red Cross plans to reimburse the food suppliers.

One of the most difficult situations arising from the storm was the family who came to the American Red Cross Shelter at Carter Parramore Jr High School hysterical because a tree had fallen on their house, Clark said.

All in all, “We worked hard, but we learned a lot,” she said of the experience.

Civil Defense Director Charlie Betts paid tribute to the county Sheriff’s Office and the road and bridge department, which had personnel working with chainsaws to clear roads even during the hurricane.

Road and Bridge Director Marvin McDaniel said roads in Reston and Lake Yvette were still blocked Monday, but that most of the county’s main roads had been cleared.

Betts said he’d driven around the county with state and federal officials over the weekend, and “they agreed there had been extensive damage.” He doubted, however, that the county would qualify for disaster aid because most of the people who received property damage probably had some form of insurance.

The civil defense director estimated that damage to Gadsden County would be in the millions.

Lieutenant Gene Griffis of the Quincy Public Safety Department reported that police had been riding streets and running chainsaws in about equal proportion all day Friday.

“I don’t know any way to estimate the damage,” he said. “There’s no telling what it will come to.”

Police had no reports of serious injury to citizens, he said. There had been one fire call to wood frame house north of town Thursday night; the fire had been started by a candle and resulted in about \$150 worth of damage.

At the station Friday evening, a man came to the front desk asking if he could once again use city power equipment to operate his oxygen machine.

Quincy's Winn Dixie and IGA stores operated all day Friday, with customers spending most of their money on ready-to-eat foods, candles, and batteries.

"Mac" McKenzie, IGA food store manager, said that by 5:17PM Friday, there'd been 2,700 customers through the store that day, purchasing some 25,113 items. On a normal day, between 3,500 and 4,000 customers might be in and out of the store, he said.

"It wasn't that there were more customers," McKenzie said. "But our whole computerized system went crazy."

IGA, which operates a banking service through area banks, was unable to provide money to anyone who wanted to cash checks.

One truck driver approached McKenzie at the store about 5:20PM, asking if he could cash a check. "You can't get into a motel or do anything without cash," he said.

But, "If we had the money, we'd do it," McKenzie told the man. "We just don't have the money."

He said the store's banking service should be back in gear by Saturday morning.

At Winn Dixie, racks of candles were empty Friday afternoon.

"People are getting everything they can get," said Lee Browning. "The early crowd got beer. Then later, it was candles, batteries, bottled water, charcoal, and ready-to-eat foods."

City public works crewman Jim Copeland called Hurricane Kate "the worst storm I've seen since 1955."

He and fellow city workers had been out since 7:00AM Friday, picking up trash, emptying public dumpsters. At Carter-Parramore Jr High School, abandoned by afternoon after housing hundreds of hurricane refugees the previous night, Copeland commented that while working, he and his partner had seen cars in ditches, trees on cars and houses, power lines down everywhere.

"I'll tell you what, If people don't have to be out, they should stay in," he said. "It's dangerous out there."

City Manager Buddy Johnson, in shirtsleeves and jeans, walked into the police station as dark approached Friday night. He informed law officers he was about to tell city workers to knock off by 8:00PM and prepare to start work again Saturday morning.

"You can't do much past dark anyway," he said.

Just how bad was Hurricane Kate?

“If it gets worse, I don’t want to see it,” Johnson said.