

THEY'RE PICKING UP THE PIECES LEFT BY KATE

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Written By Vinny Kuntz

This particular tree near the new Bronough-Duval overpass smashed a Ford, a house and a power line.

And electrical lineman Luther Fountain's task is to fix part of the damage.

From treetop level as he splices two cables together, Fountain speaks of Hurricane Kate and Tallahassee's fondness for trees:

"I bet by the time this is over this town won't be so tree crazy."

Fountain, 53 was among a legion of city workers Friday patching together the splintered pieces of normalcy torn asunder by the hurricane.

Journeyman lineman Robert Taylor says most citizens don't blame the workers for the utility interruptions, but some do.

"You don't know what to tell them. We're doing the best we can."

Across town at Centerville Road, traffic is blocked but orange-garbed sanitation workers use rakes, big pitchforks and a yellow tractor with a jaw-like boom to clear downed trees.

With resounding thuds, the tractor dumps the debris in a large truck nearby until the material grows into a mountain of moss-draped lumber.

"I wish I had a fireplace," says Alonzo Jones, 52, as he rakes together the remains of what used to be several large trees blocking the road near the Tallahassee Memorial Regional Medical Center.

A snapped utility pole dangles over-head. Sawdust covers the road. Coils of downed power wire snake around a guardrail.

Earl Ervin, 54, usually a city maintenance man, plays traffic cop by diverting cars away from the mess.

"It's going to be a wild week for us boys," he says.

It was work for the last 29 hours straight for city electrician John Smith by midday Friday. Tired?

“No,” he says. “Once daylight comes you just start perking up again.”

Smith and another employee wait at the 1400 block of Mitchell Avenue for tree cutters to arrive and, they hope, for co-workers to bring them lunch.

“I couldn’t find a cotton-pickin’ place to eat,” he says.

As buzz saws drone nearby, Smith surveys the damage on just one block:

Two medium-sized pines, one large pine, one oak and one dogwood have blocked the road and pulled down power, phone and cable-TV lines. When will it be made right?

“To be honest with you, I just don’t know,” he says.

Smith and other city workers say one consolation would be fat overtime checks.

“It’s going to good for Uncle Sam, too,” says Smith, estimating the tax bite at 60 percent.

At the Bronough-Duval overpass, Fountain says he will spend his extra money on “Women, wine and hunting.”

Fellow lineman Willie Leon, 33, who began working at 6:30AM Thursday, says overtime is “all we ever talk about out here. That’s the only way to get some relief.”