

HURRICANE IAN - One Year Later

Ian

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155 mph and he is just a few hours from making landfall. You must find a safe place to ride out the storm.”

A handful of residents did stay on the island, but we can't really say they made it out "okay." They may have still had their lives, but what they went through – for most – was one of the longest 12-hour periods they have ever known.

Because 12 hours is about the time it took for Godforsaken Ian to come close to shore, make landfall at Cayo Costa at about 3:10 p.m., decide he liked the area and hung out for awhile and then slowly crawled away ... inch by inch.

What confuses a lot of people when we talk about a 12-hour storm is the fact that many of us lost all communication with the outside world between 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. By 11 a.m. the wind was seriously whipping and the rainfall was torrential. People were already losing trees and parts of their roof. By 2 p.m. it felt like we were in a Cat 3 hurricane and, if you look at the windspeed from the area at that time, we pretty much were. By 5 p.m. we were at the stage that experienced soldiers would call "in the suck."

There were tornadoes (known as mesocyclones if they're inside a hurricane) everywhere. People in Boca Grande got to experience the eye of the storm, so they had a calm period that lasted about 30 minutes. People off island on the Cape Haze Peninsula did not experience the eye – they experienced the area around the eye that is filled with mesovortices, swirling clouds with small-scale rotational features found in hurricanes with unusually strong winds. That's where the many tornadoes came from.

When Ian passed over Cuba on September 27 and made it into the Gulf, the eye was about 12 miles wide. As it turned to the northeast, toward us, satellites observed an eyewall replacement cycle happening. This means that the hurricane's eye grows larger, as does the wind field.

By the time it hit us, Tampa Bay was experiencing winds of 75 mph ... 100 miles away from the eye. Just prior to making landfall, Ian experienced another intense strengthening cycle that brought the winds up to a Category 5.

But it isn't just the windspeed that people need to worry about. Most human beings who know anything about hurricanes assume that the worst will be over in an hour, maybe three hours. Hurricane Charley zipped by in about 45 minutes. This hurricane

was more than 500 miles across from tip to tip, moving at about 7 mph. And it rolled around a bit before it moved on from the coast, which means it decided to sit and wobble instead of moving forward. People watching from outside the storm area were horrified to see the giant storm just sitting on coastal Florida for so long.

It took Ian 90 minutes for the eye to get from Cayo Costa to Punta Gorda, which is almost the distance across that the eye measured at that time. It is believed that anywhere from 12 to 23 inches fell in that time.

Hours went by with the wind just howling and the wind-driven rain pounding against buildings like BBs. With each new gust the banging of objects against the house, the breaking glass, the knowledge that your house was slowly being taken apart, piece by piece in winds that were so strong ... winds that should never stay for that long.

And every time you would think it was slowing down, it somehow found the strength to crank it back up even worse than before.

It didn't really settle down until about 11 p.m.

One of the most-asked questions after September 28 was whether Ian was a Category 5 hurricane or not. For months after the giant storm, the

weather researchers who came out to the island and set up towers in different locations to monitor the winds would not speak about what they had found out in their research, but in April of this year the National Hurricane Center announced that Hurricane Ian had attained category 5 status with 160 mph sustained winds and a central pressure of 937 mb for a few hours ... before weakening slightly and hitting Florida as a devastating Cat 4.

The Hurricane Center was quoted as saying, "Note that the uncertainties in the final 'best-track' estimates of hurricane intensities are around ±10%, and there is very little practical difference between a 160-mph category 5 and a 155-mph category 4 hurricane, which was its peak intensity as initially assessed."

But to many, it does make a difference. Anemometers at homes on and off the island had given readings of 180 mph winds before they were dispatched permanently by the storm, yet no official reading even came close. Charlotte County administrators met after the storm and reported anemometer readings of 209 mph. Maybe we'll never know for sure, we'll just never forget what it felt like.

North Island hit hard, still recovering

BY GARLAND POLLARD

Of all the places hit on the island by Hurricane Ian, the northern end of Gasparilla Island was among the worst, with major destruction at complexes like Boca Grande North and Dunes of Boca. Not only was the north end exposed, but the counter-clockwise direction of Ian, rolling over very shallow water, meant that it hit with great force there.

This week, on the one-year anniversary of Ian, staff at Safety Harbor Builders, located at the north court of the Boca Grande Hotel shopping center, are still keeping a spreadsheet of the 83 projects that they have in various stages of progress. That shopping center was recovery central for hundreds of workers and thousands of meals in the immediate months after Hurricane Ian hit.

"We are still just inundated," said Chip Crawford, one of the three owners of the firm. When Ian arrived, it was only nine months after staffers Crawford, Gary Bingamen and Randy Luciano had purchased Safety Harbor Builders, a design-build contractor that did the original work on Boca Bay.

"We did a certain amount of triage," said Crawford. Because they could not help everyone at one time, the first task was to take care of immediate needs and prioritize the rest.

The challenge of being a builder at the time of a

large disaster is that you are not only managing current work and new construction, but taking on small and medium jobs from desperate customers. In the process, customers stepped up.

"A client even offered up a house," said Crawford.

Other local businesses returned immediately to get things sorted out.

"I was here right away," said Jeremy Michaels, service manager for the Boca Grande Hotel and Palmetto Inn. They were able to reopen on Nov. 15, just six weeks after the storm.

Since the storm, they have not only updated rooms, but also put up a new, sturdier metal roof on all the buildings of the shopping center and hotel.

Through the recovery process there were many surprises, including a miracle five-second fix for the hotel's satellite dish, bent by the wind on one side of the hotel building.

"All we had to do was knock it with a hammer," said Michaels.

There were other blessings, as well, including the "10 days that it was really nice" after the storm, Michaels said. Those cool, clear blue days helped to make work easier and relieved worry about the roof, which had to be replaced. It was a composite shingle, and it is now durable metal.

"I am glad to see things return to normal," said Michaels.

Of all the properties on the north end, Boca



Grande North was among the worst casualties, and it is still not yet completed. What was its best selling point, namely its views and status – being its own island with views both of Gasparilla Sound and the Gulf of Mexico – also meant that it was the most exposed, as it is only feet from the water.

"It's the first thing you see on Boca Grande on the way in, and the last thing that you see on the way out," said Board President Sam Grogan. At the complex, the exteriors are about 85 percent complete, and should be done by the end of the year. Insulation and drywall replacement will be sooner.

After the storm, Grogan said that one major goal was to put the complex in as good or better shape, with as little money as possible.

Immediately after the storm, the association voted for a \$5,000 assessment right out of the gate. A

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