



# ENDURING CHAOS

Neil Henderson, DVM, returns to Louis Pomes' 100-acre farm in St. Bernard Parish, La., to check on cattle he had been treating after Hurricane Katrina devastated the property. Before the hurricane, Pomes had nearly 200 cattle and 26 horses. Only 70 cattle are left.

COURTESY, LESLIE TALLEY



# GULF COAST HURRICANE REPORT

## K A T R I N A & R I T A

BY STEPHANIE L. CHURCH AND KIMBERLY S. HERBERT

**M**ore than 350 Louisiana horses and mules were rescued after Hurricane Katrina devastated parts of the Gulf Coast on August 29. Rescuers dealt daily with images of destruction—such as barns full of trapped horses that didn't survive the storm surge. Some horses simply weren't able to touch the ground in the nine feet of sludge that rose around them when levees broke.

But amid the destruction, there were also stories of triumph. Many horses that were turned out to fend for themselves were able to get to high ground. Horses and cattle were found together grazing atop levees that became islands of refuge; others remained close to home even without food or clean water, needing someone to save them. A few were found camped out in front of a feed store, waiting for someone to bring out dinner.

Organization arose from chaos and necessity, and there were numerous unnamed heroes who risked their own health and safety to brave contaminated waters, sometimes impassable roads, and the indescribable misery around them to make a difference in the lives of Southern Louisiana horses and their owners.

### Louisiana Battered, Not Beaten

Bonnie Clark, president of the Louisiana Equine Council, and other horse industry officials earlier this year planned locations for equine staging areas in case of a hurricane. "When the storm hit (Aug. 29), we hung out for about three days because we couldn't do anything—the state police wouldn't let anyone down (into affected areas) because of the water and the general situation," Clark said. "I got a call on Thursday morning (Sept. 1) from Dr. (Martha) Littlefield (DVM), the assistant state veterinarian, and she said we were going to have the first load of horses brought in to Lamar-Dixon" by area veterinarians. Lamar-Dixon is a large expo center in Gonzales, La., that eventually became home to thousands of animals, including 364 horses.

Clark and Louisiana State University (LSU) field veterinarian Dennis French, DVM, arrived at Lamar-Dixon before the first load of horses and sized up the situation. "We decided we needed hay, we needed buckets...we had nothing here, so we started getting all this stuff together."

Everything began coming together to care for the animals at Lamar-Dixon, but not fast enough, initially. The first night,

Clark, French, and a handful of vet students had one bucket to water 63 horses out of Kenner, La. But the donations soon began rolling in, and by the fourth day, the team had more than enough supplies.

Over the next week, the team developed a boarding facility and veterinary clinic with a capacity for 350 horses from what had been empty stalls under metal roofs.

### Who's Helping Horses?

Meanwhile, back at LSU in Baton Rouge, it became apparent in the days immediately following the storm that officials at the state veterinarian's office were overwhelmed with everything from managing public health to getting dairy cows milked without electricity. Rustin Moore, DVM, PhD, Dipl. ACVS, director of the Equine Health Studies Program (EHSP) at LSU's School of Veterinary Medicine, said the school had begun receiving calls about horses left behind, industry members who wanted to help, and people generally wondering who was in charge of horse relief. Moore and his colleagues never hesitated.

"On Thursday, Sept. 1, we initiated the Horse Hurricane Helpline at LSU," Moore said. A call center was set up in a conference



**Darnell Stewart (left, with his Paint stallion Brandy) and Lucien Mitchell (with the Arabian gelding Fidel) helped save the horses and mules of New Orleans' Charbonnet Mid-City Carriages after Katrina hit.**

COURTESY DR. RUSTIN MOORE

## Saving New Orleans Carriage Horses

"I wasn't leaving," said Lucien Mitchell, 40, who stayed behind in New Orleans for nearly a week caring for 22 carriage horses and mules after Hurricane Katrina ripped through the city, destroying structures and lives, and leaving water that overwhelmed levees and produced catastrophic flooding. "If you love animals like I love animals, you'd stick with it, too. We did what we had to do to save them."

Mitchell and Darnell Stewart, 34, are heroes to many after they overcame dangerous conditions to save as many of the horses and mules as they could from Charbonnet Mid-City Carriages (the men's employer) in the week following Katrina's landfall. Twenty-seven of

the animals were evacuated prior to the storm, but before the trailers could get back, another 22 animals ended up stranded in chest-high water, and the men weren't going to let the animals perish.

On Aug. 30, after realizing how rapidly the water was rising after the levee broke, Mitchell and Stewart began moving the horses out of the stable yard to higher ground at a nearby park, sometimes swimming along with the horses in the rapidly rising water.

The men tied the animals to the park fence and began tending to their needs, bringing fresh water from the National Guard and salvaged feed for the animals. The two took turns

sleeping on a bridge at the park "playing lookout," since New Orleans residents were continually trying to take the horses and mules. At one point, Mitchell was dragged through the flooded city streets while trying to catch Tootsie, a loose mule. "I was waterskiing!" he said.

Stewart rode his Paint stallion, Brandy, daily to look for help until he injured his foot on debris and had to leave for treatment.

Help arrived Sept. 4. The 21 remaining equids (one died in the park) were trailered to the equine staging site in Gonzales, La. Nineteen survived. (More information: [www.TheHorse.com/emag.aspx?id=6114](http://www.TheHorse.com/emag.aspx?id=6114).)

—Stephanie L. Church



**Louisiana veterinarians Jeff Artelle, DVM, (left) and Shannon Gonsoulin, DVM, rescue a horse from a residential area of St. Bernard Parish, La.**

COURTESY DRs. ARTELLE AND GONSOLIN

room where faculty, students, and volunteers manned the phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. (It slowed considerably four weeks after Katrina hit, but stepped back up before and after Hurricane Rita.)

Word spread quickly of the hotline, and thousands of calls rolled in. What started as a room with one phone, maps of the seven affected parishes, and a few phone numbers scribbled on a chalk board turned into a veritable command center with five

constantly ringing phones and continual research using Google Maps and Google Earth. Eventually, a database was created for all the information.

"Dr. Jay Addison (DVM, a veterinarian from north of Lake Ponchartrain) is from here, he knows the area, and he started pulling truckloads of horses out of St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parish" immediately after the storm, said Ky Mortensen, director of advancement for the EHSP. "I'll

bet he and his partner (Ron Giardina, DVM) pulled out easily a third of everything we got (in the end)." See "Rescuing the Horses of St. Bernard Parish" at [www.TheHorse.com/emag.aspx?id=6111](http://www.TheHorse.com/emag.aspx?id=6111) to read more about Addison's and Giardina's efforts.

But there were still hundreds of horses to be reached with no way to efficiently access and assess devastated regions. The rescues so far had been successful but slow, (continued on page 26)



# ENDURING CHAOS

## Unprecedented Destruction

"The power of that water is really evident when you look at the area and see what it did...it tossed around 18-wheelers like they were toys," Leslie Talley said as she drove through the outskirts of New Orleans, La. Talley is supervisor of veterinary technicians in the equine section of Louisiana State University's veterinary teaching hospital. "There was just a general disarray of things—a careless placement of normal, everyday stuff."

"At first, you have that reaction where you're thinking, 'Oh...my...gosh,'" she explains, expressing the shock and horror that she felt during her first drive into storm-ravaged areas. "And then you just focus; you focus at the task at hand. The rescues are your purpose for being there, and you get past the smell and the sight of devastation and random dead things laying everywhere, and cars sitting on houses and houses sitting on cars."

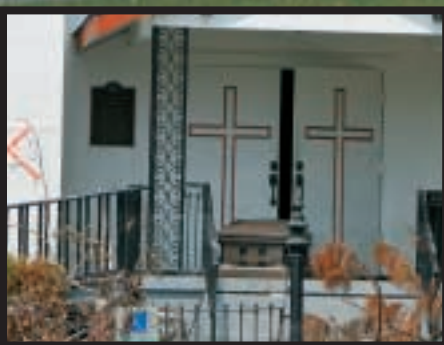
Like Louisiana, Waveland, Miss., had its share of juxtaposition—houses thrown upside down and sideways, boats now on dry land, and animals killed.—Stephanie L. Church



COURTESY LESLIE TALLEY



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STEPHANIE L. CHURCH



COURTESY DR. EDWARD FEINBERG



STEPHANIE L. CHURCH

Images counter-clockwise from top right: Aisle of barn in St. Bernard Parish, La.; yard in a flooded St. Bernard residential neighborhood; coffin that floated from a St. Bernard cemetery across Bayou Road to rest at a church's doors; destroyed home in Waveland, Miss.; and remains of a stallion tangled in a fence, probably during the storm surge, in St. Bernard—the brown foliage shows how high the floodwaters reached. Background image: Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in the streets of Waveland, Miss.

BACKGROUND PHOTO COURTESY DR. TOMAS GIMENEZ

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due to the different government channels that required navigation before actually getting into devastated regions. Becky McConico, DVM, PhD, Dipl. ACVIM, said that after one successful rescue, she asked permission from the state vet's office for LSU-organized teams to perform rescues without the office's oversight. "They said, 'You all have your act together—just keep doing it and keep us in the loop,'" McConico said. "And they never pulled the reins in on us, ever."

Some rescues were relatively uneventful. Rescuers were sent after one or more horses that were stranded, and horses were found, loaded, and delivered. Others were more dramatic. In areas that were beaten

by the storm surge, tornadoes, and an ensuing flood, rescuers often had to walk through several feet of thick, black muck in order to reach horses.

Other rescues were performed in the midst of civil unrest. Early in the rescue efforts, Dan Burba, DVM, Dipl. ACVS, was involved with a harrowing rescue of carriage animals from the New Orleans Roaring 20's Carriage Company. Texas mounted posse had rounded up the five mules and two horses in a parking lot near an area where most of the mayhem had ensued among city residents. Burba's team was escorted by two ex-military men for protection.

"Our guys went ahead to try and scope

out and came back fairly quickly, as the military was engaged in some gunfire in that area," Burba said. So they had to improvise, relying on their Nextel connection with the command center in Baton Rouge, where Mortensen used a map to verbally guide Burba through the streets when he hit road blocks. "This was a hot zone...it felt like we were in a war zone down in that area. There were military operations going on all over the place and you could hear gunfire.

"We knew that special ops individuals had been engaged (in gunfire) because when we stopped and talked with them, two of them were scoping the roof towers as we were standing there, and of course all of them had M16s drawn," Burba continued. With the officers' help and guidance from the command center, Burba's team found the mules and got them loaded, even with helicopters criss-crossing the sky.

After each day's rescues, volunteers unloaded horses, while someone (often Clark) would write down each horse's place of origin, description, and identifying features (tattoos, microchip identification, or brands). The fourth-year LSU vet students triaged the horses. French said proudly, "These veterinary students that I've had out here...they're not students anymore, they're colleagues. They can manage cases, and they can manage people."

Situation reports were sent to the state veterinarian's office each evening, and the effort to reunite horses with owners began.

Bridget Kidwell, a fourth-year vet student from Central, La., was at Lamar-Dixon from day one. Her most memorable experience was treating a mild colic case that lasted several days. The most valuable thing she learned from this experience? "Triage," she said confidently. "How to run in quickly and assess the situation—what needs to be done now, and what can wait."

Moore said some of the horses had lacerations from debris, skin irritations from being in high water for many days, and diarrhea from consuming brackish flood water. "But most of them were in pretty good shape, despite what they've been through," he said. "They seemed to settle in to their new environment, where there was a tremendous number of very caring volunteers that fed them, bathed them, loved on them, and walked them every day."

LSU staff and volunteers experienced an outpouring of support from those who wanted to help the displaced horses and

owners. Nina French, Dennis French's wife and an LSU canine rehab technician, managed some of the barns at Lamar-Dixon. She explained, "I've got a letter in my car from some girls in New York—they're 10 or 12 years old. They went in their tack room, they got buckets, they took out their horses' stuff, their leather halters with the horses' name tags, good lead ropes, and a bucket of brushes, and sent it to me. And all the note said was 'God bless.'"

"You know? That's how cool it is," she said, then laughed as the tears sprung to her eyes. "Oh, I've been here too long."

Clark has a nagging concern about some well-intended rescue groups that came in for equine rescue, but did not check in the horses at Lamar-Dixon. "If they remove horses, they should bring them here so we can catalogue them, because this is where the owners know to come," she pleaded. "If they take them somewhere other than here, I don't know where they are."

"I had a gentleman who knows his horse was picked up, and it's not here," she said. "I don't know where to tell him to look."

In addition to that challenge, the team at Lamar-Dixon dealt with rumors on a daily basis. Among them were stories that there were hundreds of critically ill horses, that officials were desperate for equine volunteers, and that the place was a mess.

"We haven't been desperate for anything," said Clark. "After about the first 24 hours, we were in good shape and organized. Everybody did such a great job, there were great core people here."

### Reconnecting

Horse and owner reunions have been particularly rewarding to those involved in the rescue efforts. "This has been a very exhausting, exhilarating experience for everyone, and one of many, many emotional highs and some emotional lows," Moore said. "Whether it was a 10-year-old boy or a 60-year-old woman that walked in there...deep down, they were hoping beyond all hope that (their horse) was there," said a visibly moved Moore. "And after walking through barn after barn and not seeing their horse, and finally stumbling upon it...it was an incredible thing to see."

Just about everyone had a favorite reunion story. Nina French told of a man who came to Lamar-Dixon who "knew for a fact that all of his animals were dead," she said. The man's son had no shoes and the

family had lost their home in the New Orleans flooding. He thought Lucian Mitchell (see "Saving..." on page 23), was teasing him when he said that the man's horse was alive. "When he saw his horse (alive), he literally sat down crying, then he worried that we weren't going to give him his horse back. 'It's *your* horse,' I said."



PHOTOS COURTESY DR. RUSTIN MOORE

**EHSP PhD student Lee Ann Fugler, DVM, and hospital intern Jimmy Redmon, DVM, answer Horse Hurricane Help-line calls. Sharon Williams (right) was reunited with her horse Flash after believing the horse had perished in St. Bernard Parish's Canal Street Barn.**



underwater completely, and there's no way horses survived." Nine dead horses were found at the farm, but reportedly there should have been more than 40 horses.

"Where this stable was located, it took the full force of the tidal surge—it had collapsed from a fairly large barn to rubble," Moore continued. "And so we assumed these horses had been washed away with the tidal surge. Because (Williams) had called so many times, we called twice and told her it certainly didn't look good."

"The pleasant surprise on the Saturday of Labor Day weekend was she came by to look for her horse and he was there," Moore added. "There were a lot of tearful reunions of these people."

### Aftermath and Recommendations

The Katrina experience has given horse owners a chance to mentally review what kind of precautions to take in the event of a severe hurricane warning. "You've got to make a decision if you're going to stay or you're going to go (evacuate), and you're going to have to make it at least two to three days prior to the storm and go ahead and do it—you're better safe than sorry," Clark said. "If you decide to leave your horses, you need to take precautions to give them the best chance to survive if it should be a direct hit."

A common thought among the vets and volunteers: Turn horses out if expecting a hurricane that might involve a sizable storm surge or flooding. Owners had no way of knowing Katrina's magnitude and its resulting flooding, but turned out horses had a chance to swim to higher ground. Also, owners should identify their animals, even if it's with a painted phone number on the horse's side. Use a non-local number, since most phone lines won't work after the storm.

As of Sept. 26, 364 equines had been processed at Lamar-Dixon, and 163 had left with owners. Moore summarized, "To me it shows that when there's a common desire, people from all parts of the equine community will show a true team spirit."

(continued on page 30)



STEPHANIE L. CHURCH

**Louis Pomes and the bottles he used to haul water to surviving livestock in his parish.**

from the building where they took refuge, he joined rescue teams trying to find human survivors using boats found in the parish.

"Fifty-six miles of levee surrounds our parish, like a big ol' bowl waiting to be filled," he said. "It only took a couple of hours for it to fill up, and it'll take a couple of weeks to get the water out."

Pomes scaled the Mississippi River levee every day in order to fill five-gallon bottles with clean river water for surviving livestock around his parish, and led rescue teams to animals. Feeding and watering animals in the same places daily made it easier for rescuers to catch them.

This was in spite of his own losses. Before the storm Pomes had 26 horses, mostly Paints, and close to 200 cattle. All 26 horses died and only 70 of the cattle survived. His house washed 2,000 feet away from its foundation into his back pasture. Every mile of Pomes' fencing was destroyed, and his pasture was smothered by the brackish muck that sludged his property. "Not a nickel's worth of flood insurance and nine feet of water," he said. "Don't ever let anyone convince you that you don't need flood insurance. If I live on top of a mountain, I'm going to buy flood insurance."

But Louis Pomes isn't going anywhere. "If I have to live in my tent, I'm staying," Pomes said. He hopes he'll have enough feed and hay to get his remaining cattle through the winter. A new friend from LSU is giving him a Paint yearling to raise. "One horse, I think I can handle that," he said. "I have to have a horse—it's in my blood—I have to have one."

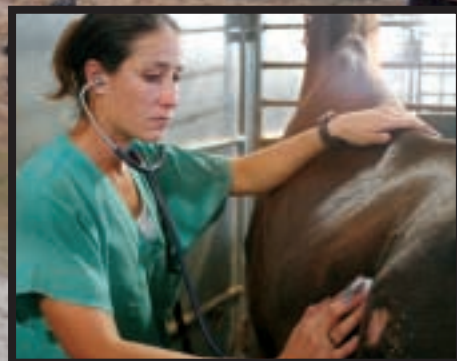
See [www.TheHorse.com/emag.aspx?id=6215](http://www.TheHorse.com/emag.aspx?id=6215) for more information.—Stephanie L. Church



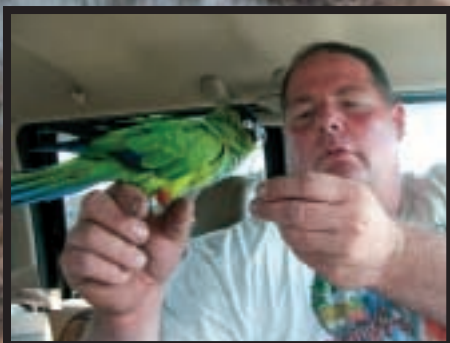
# ENDURING CHAOS



COURTESY DR. EDWARD FEINBERG



STEPHANIE L. CHURCH



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## To the Rescue

When equine teams went out on rescue missions, they didn't limit themselves to horses. They often picked up a variety of animals that needed help, many of which had been cared for in the aftermath by locals or National Guard members. They would take these animals to field veterinary clinics such as the ones shown above.

Local residents were key in rescue attempts. Many times they had cared for parish livestock and animals, and they pointed rescuers toward animals that needed help.

Sometimes the teams were accompanied by owners of the horses. Louisiana State's Sarah Lyle, DVM, MS, Dipl. ACT, said, "You never know what's going to happen...whether you can find them, whether you can catch them, whether they'll be alive or not. So you have this great trepidation about what you're going to have to deal with when you get down there." Fortunately, there were more successes when owners were along than tragedies. Survivors fared well, considering their situations. "Some we pulled out of standing water up to their elbows," explained Lyle. "We tried to give them fresh water and all they wanted was the feed that we had." Many horses had survived by snacking on leaves, since most of the grass was killed by floodwater.—Stephanie L. Church

Images clockwise from top right: A field veterinary clinic in Gulfport, Miss.; vet student Bridget Kidwell and a colic patient at the Lamar-Dixon Expo Center in Gonzales, La.; Drs. Dale Paccamonti and Lee Ann Fugler with rescued dogs in St. Bernard Parish, La.; a rescued cat in Gulfport, Miss.; and volunteer Robbie Murphy of Prairieville, La., holds a rescued bird in St. Bernard Parish, La. Background image: Horses await rescue on the back levee in lower Plaquemines Parish, La.

BACKGROUND IMAGE BY LESLEY TALLEY



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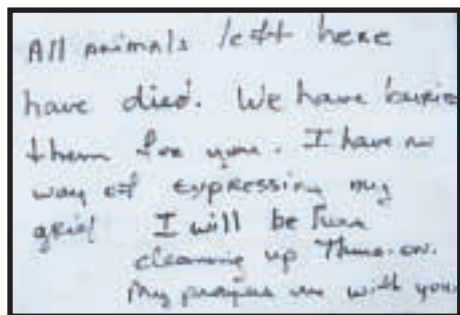
"Every life was changed overnight in this area. Every life in America was changed. What if we did get attacked by a foreign country? I can tell you now that it would be like it is here," said Jacqueline Broome, DVM, a mixed practice veterinarian from Gulfport, Miss., who managed to save 30 horses on her farm by turning them loose to weather the storm with their natural instincts, but she lost 29 of the animals in her clinic in town.

Broome describes herself as a tough broad, who in her 40s has seen and done enough to toughen her to reality for people, and animals. She also admitted she had cried every day since the hurricane hit.

Broome had decided to ride out the hurricane at her clinic, but when her sister

help. They were able to respectfully bury the animals. She said Edward Feinberg, DVM, who was with the VMAT-2 team, "had a heart bigger than he was."

She hand-printed a sign to her clients (see below). Broome said, "I'm not going back in that building. It's not a medical facility any more. It's a place of death and



COURTESY DR. EDWARD FEINBERG

darkness, and I don't want to be there."

She said many vets in Louisiana and Mississippi left animals in clinics, and many lost animals. "I lost 29. Another shelter in New Orleans lost 39. I at least could bury bodies. Other clinics lost the bodies (when the storm surge tides washed the buildings away). It was the same with people."

Broome said locals take issue with those outside the area discussing what happened: It wasn't a flood that came up

called and said their mother was having chest pains, she closed the clinic, loaded up a couple of blind horses and some dogs, and headed north to her mother.

She was told that when a 20-foot wall of water started through Gulfport, several locals on jet skis tried to get to the clinic, knowing there were animals inside, but it was impossible to reach.

Once she was able to get back to Gulfport, Broome immediately went to her clinic. She stood outside and cried, knowing the fate of the animals inside. She was outside her clinic when the American Veterinary Medical Association's Veterinary Medical Assistance Team 2 (VMAT-2) arrived to

slowly, it was a wall of water that came suddenly and viciously, and it wiped out everything in its path.

"This was a wave like the tsunami," she described. "Winds of 160 miles per hour were pushing a wall of Gulf of Mexico water. It wasn't a flood, it was a bomb."

Broome's farm was destroyed, but the chickens, peacocks, and turkeys all survived, as did all 30 horses.

Unfortunately, said Broome, there were unscrupulous individuals who came in to "rescue" horses in the name of recognized groups, only for the owners to later discover that the animals had been stolen and probably sold to slaughter. "A lot of people

lost horses to 'good Samaritans,'" she said.

"I hate to see articles about people or animals," said Broome. "They are interwoven. How many people died staying with animals? How many dogs died staying with their families?"

Broome has continued working in Gulfport via her cell phone, but service is still spotty. Clients will see her on the street and need her services, or they'll call and she'll meet them somewhere.

"All my clients, I see them everywhere," Broome said. "That's made a difference. I feel loved, needed. I have value. The underlying common thread is the animals."

There has been an outpouring of donations for those hit by Hurricane Katrina. In Mississippi, the state's Veterinary Medical Association has set up a fund to help animals and the veterinarians who care for them. To donate, contact the Mississippi Animal Relief Fund at 888/722-3106. (Be patient, it might take a while to get through.) Donations (as well as supplies and equipment) can be mailed to: Mississippi Animal Relief Fund, 209 S. Lafayette, Starkville, MS 39759.

Broome said no fewer than four veterinarians, "some I don't even know," have offered help. "Some even handed me keys (to their clinics)."

Broome said not everyone is leaving the area, although there are many who have been forced to leave to find a place to live and work. Seven employees from her clinic have moved.

When asked how people might help her, she said, "We're raised to not ask for things, but I think I've given a different answer to everyone who's asked me. Right now I'm at ground zero. No X ray or ultrasound or anesthesia machines. What I've learned in all this is that people feel good when they can do something to help and make a difference. In many ways, people who want to help are as frustrated as we are."

### VMAT-2 in Mississippi

Tomas Gimenez, Dr. Med. Vet, is a professor of animal and veterinary sciences at Clemson University, an instructor in emergency and disaster planning and rescue (along with his wife, Rebecca, PhD, a major in the U.S. Army Reserves), and a member of VMAT-2, deployed under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina. He is also a new dog owner.

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"Tupelo" traveled from Mississippi to South Carolina with Gimenez as a happy reminder of the aftermath.

"We were searching for animals one day and ran into the Tupelo, Miss., Rescue Squad doing house-to-house searches (for people and animals)," said Gimenez. The rescue squad and police noticed there appeared to be mud that was moving just as we (the VMAT-2 team) pulled up. This poor dog was buried in mud and wrapped in power lines, but he was alive. There's no way to know how many days he'd been there; he was skin and bones. Between police officers and rescue workers and us, we put in quite a bit of time with our water bottles and gave him a bath and took him in. Everyone got pretty attached to that dog.

"I ended up adopting him and brought him home," said Gimenez. "His name is Tupelo. We will be searching the Internet lost and found pet sites to see if we can find his true owners. Meanwhile, he is getting his injuries and starvation treated. If we never find his owners, he will have a good home with us on our farm."

When VMAT-2 arrived in Mississippi, all FEMA workers were based at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi. VMAT-2 had six vans with supplies and personnel, and during the first days they split into assessment teams. "We covered pretty much the coast of Mississippi from Biloxi to the Louisiana state line," Gimenez said.

"Before we went out, the urban search and rescue teams had done a search of houses to look for human victims," Gimenez said. "When they found animals alive or dead, they let us know."

"We also had a list of vet clinics on coast of Mississippi," he said. They created the list from local phone books. "We made a



VMAT-2 team members recover the body of a dog from a home in Mississippi.

## Human Patients Seek Refuge in Texas A&M Equine Hospital



COURTESY TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Texas A&M converted the large animal hospital at the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences into a special needs facility to care for elderly patients from Houston and pediatric patients from Galveston during Hurricane Rita. The hospital was emptied of animals, sanitized, and converted for human patient use in less than a day. By the night before the hurricane was due to make landfall, the facility had become the largest "receiving" human hospital in Central Texas, housing nearly 300 patients and their families and caretakers.

Patients ranged from young children recovering from severe burns and physical handicaps to senior citizens from nursing homes (one patient was reportedly 104 years old). Doctors, nurses, veterinary faculty and technicians, veterinary and medical students, staff, and volunteers all pitched in to do what was needed. The initial medical care was under

the direction of P.K. Carlton, MD, of the Texas A&M Health Science Center and former Surgeon General of the U.S. Air Force, and the facilities were under the direction of William Moyer, DVM, head of the Department of Veterinary Large Animal Clinical Sciences, and H. Richard Adams, Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine. Personnel and medical supplies came from a variety of agencies (Centers for Disease Control, Public Health Service, FEMA, and local hospitals). The special needs facility was equipped to handle more patients if the need arose. At the height of activity, approximately 2,200 meals were served in a single day. All involved had one common purpose, stated Texas A&M President Robert M. Gates: To care for the most vulnerable among us.—*Kimberly S. Herbert*

point to visit every clinic to get information on what happened to the vets and animals. From those sources we started finding out where live animals were that needed assistance, and where there were dead animals.

"Our work consisted many times of recovering dead animals," he said. They had to put on protective gear and breathing apparatus to go into facilities and bring out body bags with carcasses for disposal.

"There were vet clinics that were wiped out," he said. "One vet inhaled so much water he had pneumonia. A horse vet was holding onto a tree to save his life."

The VMAT-2 team also found a lot of stray animals, mostly dogs and cats, "and part of our mission was to bring food and water and leave it for the animals. Our job was not to pick up live animals. We would find out where loose dogs and cats were and notify HSUS (the Humane Society of the United States), and they would go pick them up." Team members did rescue a few injured or trapped animals.

After the storm, many areas were inaccessible by vehicles, so mounted police units came in to keep looters at bay and take control of outlying areas. Gimenez said several of those horses had leg and hoof injuries from stepping on debris.

After VMAT-2 was in Mississippi about five days, they set up a field hospital in Gulfport. Horse owners could come or call team members for help. "We were in areas where the equine veterinarian was injured or had lost his practice. People there had horses with normal needs that horse people have everywhere. They needed vaccines. They had lame horses. But no one was around to provide veterinary assistance."

Supplies for the VMAT teams took days to arrive due to the blocked roads and downed power lines on the roadways. "We did the best we could," he concluded. 🐾

FOR MORE HURRICANE COVERAGE:  
[www.TheHorse.com/2005hurricanes](http://www.TheHorse.com/2005hurricanes)

## Helping Horses and Owners

Rescue teams and officials have said that the best way to help horses in hurricane-affected areas is by making financial contributions to organizations that are earmarking funds for horses and horse owners. Following is a condensed list of such organizations. (For a comprehensive list, see [www.TheHorse.com/emag.aspx?id=6081](http://www.TheHorse.com/emag.aspx?id=6081).)

### 🐾 American Association of Equine Practitioners Foundation's Disaster Relief Fund

Online: [www.aaep.org/f\\_disaster\\_relief.php](http://www.aaep.org/f_disaster_relief.php) (mail-in form)  
By phone/e-mail: 800/443-0177 or email [ageran@aaep.org](mailto:ageran@aaep.org)  
Mail: AAEP Foundation  
4075 Iron Works Parkway  
Lexington, KY 40511

### 🐾 American Horse Council

Online: [www.horsecouncil.org/invitation3.htm](http://www.horsecouncil.org/invitation3.htm)  
Mail: Make check payable to American Horse Council; send to:  
American Horse Council  
1616 H Street NW 7th Floor  
Washington, DC 20006  
Note "Katrina equine relief" in the memo part of the check  
By phone: 202/296-4031

### 🐾 American Farrier's Association (AFA)

This fund is for helping farriers affected by Hurricane Katrina.  
Mail: Make check payable to AFA Farrier Relief Fund; send to:  
American Farrier's Association, Inc.  
4049 Iron Works Parkway  
Lexington, KY 40511  
By phone: 859/233-7411

### 🐾 American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams, AVMA Foundation

Online: <https://secure.entango.com/donate/QF49DRBwTtZ>  
Mail: Make check payable to AVMA Foundation and send to:

American Veterinary Medical Foundation, Dept. 20-1122  
PO Box 5940  
Carol Stream, IL 60197-5940  
Note "Katrina relief" in the memo part of the check)

### 🐾 Louisiana Veterinary Medical Association Equine Committee

Mail: Make check payable to the LVMA Equine Committee (note "Katrina equine relief" in the memo part of the check), and send it to: Dr. Sonny Corley, LVMA Equine Committee  
121 E. Gloria Switch  
Lafayette, LA 70507

### 🐾 United States Equestrian Federation

Online: [www.usef.org/relief/index.php](http://www.usef.org/relief/index.php) By fax: 859/231-6662  
Mail: Make check payable to the USEF Hurricane Equine Relief Fund; send to:  
The United States Equestrian Federation  
4047 Iron Works Parkway  
Lexington, KY 40511

### 🐾 Mississippi Veterinary Medical Association (MVMA)

The MVMA has set up a fund to help large and small animals, and the Mississippi veterinarians who care for them.  
By phone: Call the Mississippi Animal Relief Fund toll-free at 888/722-3106. (Be patient, it might take time to get through.)  
Mail: Mississippi Animal Relief Fund  
209 S. Lafayette  
Starkville, MS 39759

## Disaster Response: Top 10 Ways to Make a Real Impact

### 1. Understand the big picture.

How big? Hurricane Katrina created 90,000 square miles of disaster area, from deep swamps to agricultural land to quaint towns along the beach to major urban areas across five states.

### 2. Prepare and educate yourself first.

The most important thing you can do to help in a future disaster is to educate yourself ahead of time to speak the language of disasters. There are countless free basic courses on emergency management, community planning, and disaster response and relief, both for humans and animals.

### 3. Don't add to the problem.

When public sanitation and sheltering abilities are already overwhelmed, an influx of relief workers can cause a huge burden on already limited resources.

### 4. Rethink the term "hero."

The media has profiled some who went around roadblocks and entered restricted areas as "dedicated rescuers" and "heroic

citizens." But entering a dangerous area to rescue a person or animal sometimes leads to a "rescue the rescuer" situation.

### 5. Be a good leader and great follower.

Three weeks after Katrina hit, rescue organizations most needed volunteers to provide daily care for thousands of companion animals and horses at their facilities.

### 6. Soul search your motives.

If gaining clinical experience or appearing as a "hero" is your only motive for helping, you are helping for the wrong reasons.

### 7. Build on your skills and interests.

You don't have to be in the disaster zone to help. You might be most useful to an organized group by sitting at a computer in your house and helping to manage donations by inputting them in a database, coordinating shipments to needed shelters, etc.

### 8. Plug yourself into the existing plan.

Get plugged into the system of incident management at the local level first. There is a plan, and very little need to re-invent the

system. Official teams respond to requests made to it through official channels and do not sanction "free-lance" activities.

### 9. Understand your limitations.

Does a disaster mean that suddenly it is okay to allow unqualified people to conduct surgery on animals or use expired drugs to treat them? Absolutely not! Entering peoples' properties—even with the best of intentions—is dangerous and might be illegal.

### 10. Start with your own community.

Why are we so willing to help once the disaster has occurred, but we are complacent and indifferent to opportunities to prepare ourselves and our communities prior to disasters? If Hurricane Katrina has inspired you to help, turn to your own community and ask how you will respond to its particular disasters.

—By Janice Baker, DVM, and  
Rebecca Gimenez, PhD

For more information, see the full article at [www.TheHorse.com/emag.aspx?id=6214](http://www.TheHorse.com/emag.aspx?id=6214).