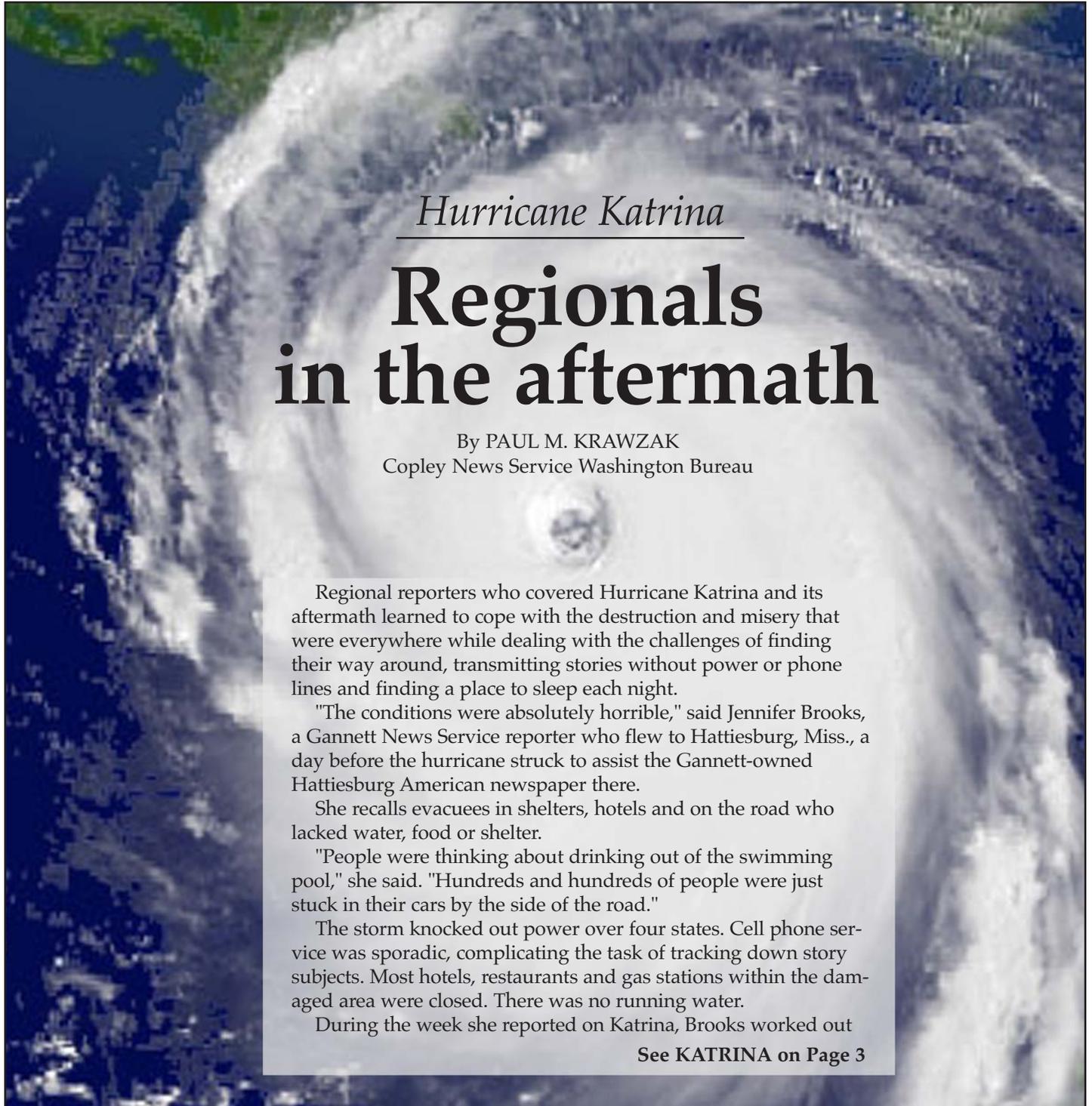


The Regional Reporter

www.rra.org

OCTOBER 2005



Hurricane Katrina

Regionals in the aftermath

By PAUL M. KRAWZAK
Copley News Service Washington Bureau

Regional reporters who covered Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath learned to cope with the destruction and misery that were everywhere while dealing with the challenges of finding their way around, transmitting stories without power or phone lines and finding a place to sleep each night.

"The conditions were absolutely horrible," said Jennifer Brooks, a Gannett News Service reporter who flew to Hattiesburg, Miss., a day before the hurricane struck to assist the Gannett-owned Hattiesburg American newspaper there.

She recalls evacuees in shelters, hotels and on the road who lacked water, food or shelter.

"People were thinking about drinking out of the swimming pool," she said. "Hundreds and hundreds of people were just stuck in their cars by the side of the road."

The storm knocked out power over four states. Cell phone service was sporadic, complicating the task of tracking down story subjects. Most hotels, restaurants and gas stations within the damaged area were closed. There was no running water.

During the week she reported on Katrina, Brooks worked out

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HOW ONE NEWS SERVICE IS HELPING SMALL PAPERS COVER THIS BIG STORY, PAGE 3

Photo by NOAA

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RESTIVE REGIONS

Bill Cahir, a corporal in the Marine Reserve, has returned from service in Iraq to cover Washington, D.C. for the Easton Express-Times and other Newhouse-owned newspapers in southern New Jersey.

Liz Ruskin, correspondent for the Anchorage Daily News, has returned from a yearlong environmental fellowship at the University of Colorado-Boulder.

The Regional Reporter

The Regional Reporter is published monthly by the Regional Reporters Association for its members. Please direct mail to:

Regional Reporters Association
Ben Franklin Station
P.O. Box 254
Washington, DC 20054-0254

Direct newsletter inquiries to newsletter editor Marc Heller at mheller@wdt.net or layout editor Jim Sergent at jjsergent@earthlink.net.

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www.rra.org.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By SAMANTHA YOUNG ■ Stephens Media Group

Sitting down with Washington's leaders

AS REGIONAL REPORTERS we're constantly looking for the local angle on Washington news, which in some cases can be more challenging than writing a national story.

While we can stake out the halls of Capitol Hill alongside our peers at the Washington Post or the New York Times, very rarely do we as individuals score a sit down interview with key lawmakers.

But as a group, we have been successful in getting an audience with Senate leadership. Over the summer, Sen. Bill Frist, R-Tenn., and Harry Reid, D-Nev., gave regional reporters exclusive audiences – both yielded stories for those in attendance.

In Frist's case, he made news detailing his thoughts about stem cells. He also answered queries about the Supreme Court and answered state-specific issues raised by reporters.

After President Bush nominated Supreme Court justice nominee John Roberts, Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., a key member of the Judiciary Committee, invited regionals to his first-in depth analysis of Roberts' legal career.

We continue to request interviews with other leading lawmakers on the hill, as well as cabinet secretaries.

Our board does much of the work, but we'd like to expand our efforts to you. If you cover an influential lawmaker, agency head or cabinet secretary, please let us know if you could help us arrange an interview.

As a group of nearly a 100 reporters, we write for audiences across the country who don't read the national newspapers. That alone should be reason enough for policy makers to give us their time.

Please contact us at regionalreporters@yahoo.com if you would be will to help. Anything from a name and phone number to your time arranging the interview would be appreciated.

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KATRINA

Continued from Page 1

of the Hattiesburg American until its generator gave out. After spending the first several nights sleeping on the newsroom floor, she latched on to a room in a hotel, one of the first places where power was restored.

One secret she discovered is that power companies book hundreds or thousands of rooms even before a hurricane hits so they will have a place to stay while making repairs. But they don't fill all the rooms, providing an opportunity for a resourceful reporter to get on a waiting list.

While Brooks was in Hattiesburg, I was driving between Montgomery, Ala., and New Orleans in search of military, firefighters and others from Springfield, Ill., Canton, Ohio and other communities where Copley Press owns newspapers, who had joined the rescue and relief effort.

In tracking down locals, I depended on cell phone numbers provided by editors. Unfortunately, in many areas reception was poor and I had to find them the old fashioned way - by hitting the road and keeping my eyes open.

Sending stories from the laptop was less of a challenge. An air card that offered a wireless connection to the Internet usually worked, although sometimes I had to walk or drive around to find a signal.

I was thankful to have packed a sleeping bag and tent, which came in handy several nights when no lodging of any kind was available.

"You can never pack enough hand sanitizer," said Brooks, who didn't get a shower for five days in the contaminated post-hurricane environment.

She also found a pencil to be more useful than a pen for taking notes in the storm-generated rain.

Being there wasn't the only way for a regional reporter to get a scoop from Katrina.

M.E. Sprengelmeyer, a correspondent for the Rocky Mountain News, zeroed in on Michael Brown, the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, who was coming under fire and had Colorado connections.

Sprengelmeyer examined Brown's qualifications and work history in Colorado, and his stories were among wider coverage that led to his resignation.

"A lot of times we have local people who are caught up in the middle of the fray, whether it's a debate over relief efforts or something at the Pentagon or some other issue," he said. "We oftentimes have local folks involved at the very heart of it who can be our entry as regional reporters into a big national story."

'Recycling' stories has enriched coverage

By LINDA DONO
Gannett News Service

While Hurricane Katrina transformed the lives of millions of people in the South, I've been playing Robin Hood.

It's a job I've had since October of last year, straying from the realm of regional editing and reporting to rob the rich papers and aid the poor.

We call it sharing copy or recycling, which all wire services do. Large papers like The Arizona Republic in Phoenix with about a half million circulation have more reporters and a more national focus than a 5,600-circulation daily in Port Clinton, Ohio, so they generally have more that can be shared.

But this sharing has evolved into creating new stories from the contents of several similar stories, developing tips and other breakouts that can be useful all year round, and producing packages large and small on topics from lung cancer to dating in the Internet age.

One of Gannett's smaller papers, the 25,000-circulation Hattiesburg (Miss.) American, was directly in Katrina's path even though it is 70 miles inland. The afternoon paper still is dealing with the destruction in its area, damage to staffers' homes, and evacuees without homes to return to who thought they would be safe an hour from the coast.

Staff members there, supplemented by a rotating list of loaners from GNS and Gannett papers, are worn to a nub and without the resources to provide comprehensive coverage of a major disaster.

Other Gannett papers in Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama have been busy covering the local effects of the hurricane but also needed information on how their readers could cope.

In the days immediately following Katrina, GNS contributed stories and tips on topics from managing stress to the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning to ideas for low-tech games kids can play without even a game board. We worked with the paper to find out exactly what it needed and what words, photos and graphics we could supply from Washington.

It makes sense to update material from papers that have dealt with hurricanes in previous years.

But relevant information can come from the most unusual places: Who would have thought that ideas from papers in snow country — the Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat and Chronicle and the Times Herald in Port Huron, Mich., for example — would be applicable to survivors of a tropical hurricane? Kids cooped up in the house during a snowstorm have a lot in common with kids stuck inside after a disaster.

The work of this Robin Hood is mostly anonymous. The stories' bylines are preserved and if additional materials from other papers or sources are woven in, those Gannett staffers are given contributing lines at the end.

So good reporting, no matter what the size of the paper, is spread far and wide and credited.

*Free Flow of Information Act***New amendments weakening strong protections of legislation***RRA considers joining media groups in endorsing bills*

By KEVIN GOLDBERG

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These bills originally provided an absolute privilege against compelled testimony before any federal judicial, legislative, executive or administrative body regarding the identity of a confidential source.
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The Regional Reporters Association Board of Directors will consider in the near future whether to endorse the "Free Flow of Information Act," the first attempt in nearly 20 years to pass a federal "shield" law providing reporters with a privilege against being forced to testify for or produce documents in federal court.

Over 80 media companies and organizations have already endorsed this legislation, which was originally introduced as HR 581 by Rep. Mike Pence (R-IN) and as S 340 by Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN), though slight adjustments have been made to these bills. They are currently pending in Congress as HR 3323 and S 1419.

These bills originally provided an absolute privilege against compelled testimony before any federal judicial, legislative, executive or administrative body regarding the identity of a confidential source. However, the newly introduced version contains a major change: even this strong protection against compelled disclosure of an absolute source can be overcome if the government demonstrates that continued protection of the source would result in "imminent and actual harm to national security."

It is important to note that, at the July 20, 2005 hearing held on this bill in the Senate Judiciary Committee, there was still some reservation that this protection might be too broad to adequately protect national security interests, meaning there might be further revision to the bill. There exists a much more qualified privilege which prohibits compelled production of documents (and, potentially, the identity of a confidential source) unless clear and convincing evidence demonstrates that the information cannot be obtained by a reasonable, alternative non-media source and: (1) in a criminal prosecution or investigation, there are reasonable grounds to believe a

crime has occurred and the information sought is essential to the prosecution or investigation or (2) in a civil case, the information is essential to a dispositive issue in a case of substantial importance.

There is also protection for information about a reporter that is sought from a third party, such as telephone toll records or E-mail records, which provides that, in the event that such records are sought, the party seeking the information shall give the reporter or publication reasonable and timely notice of the request and an opportunity to be heard before the records are disclosed.

A major criticism of most shield laws is that they allow the government to define who is and who is not a journalist. These bills attempt to avoid incorporating the ever-expanding world of journalism to those working exclusively on-line (such as "bloggers") while ensuring that not everybody who starts a Web site will be eligible for this privilege by using the term "covered entity" for those who can claim the privilege.

A covered entity is defined as the publisher of a newspaper, magazine, book journal or other periodical; a radio or television station, network or programming service; or a news agency or wire service, with a broad listing of media such as broadcast, cable, satellite or other means. It also includes any owner or operator of such entity, as well as their employees, contractors or any other person who gathers, edits, photographs, records, prepares or disseminates the news or information.

The Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on S 1419 on July 20. That was the last official action on either bill in the 109th Congress.

If you have any questions regarding the Free Flow of Information Act, please do not hesitate to contact RRA's attorney, Kevin M. Goldberg of Cohn and Marks LLP, at 202-452-4840 or Kevin.Goldberg@cohnmarks.com.

The New RRA leadership

The Regional Reporters Association recently elected new board members and officers.

President

Samantha Young has worked at the Stephens Media since 1998. She began her career with Stephens in Fort Smith, Ark., at the Southwest Times Record. A year later, Young moved to the Stephens Washington bureau where she continued writing for Arkansas papers. She also wrote for newspapers in Oklahoma and Texas. Since 2002, Young has written for the Las Vegas Review-Journal covering tourism, federal land, water and environmental issues. She also writes for papers in North Carolina, Washington State and Hawaii. As a regional reporter, Young has covered political national conventions, Sen. John Edwards presidential bid in New Hampshire, flown on the Drug Enforcement Administration plane and taken in the awesome beauty of the Grand Canyon. She recalls an assignment to tour a chicken processing plant and the miles traveled through rural Arkansas to talk politics at gas stations with the locals. Young hails from Maidenhead, England, where she returns at least once every two years to see family. She counts the United States as the fifth country she has called home. Washington is nearing the prize on the longest place Young has lived, after Belgium and Chicago.

Vice President

Suzanne Struglinski is part of the two-person Washington bureau for the Las Vegas Sun. Prior to going to the Sun Bureau in 2003, Suzanne covered Congress for three years on environment and energy issues for Greenwire, an online news service and claims to know way too much about nuclear waste. She graduated from the University of Missouri- Columbia.

Secretary

Sean Reilly has been Washington correspondent for the Mobile Register since 2000. He has worked for the paper since 1995, covering the Alabama political scene before arriving in Washington. Earlier in his career, he worked at the Anniston (Ala.) Star and was an intern at North Carolina Independent. Over the years, he has been part of Register teams that won a Scripps Howard National Journalism Award for Environmental Reporting and a Society of Professional Journalists Green Eyeshade award for business reporting. A South Carolina native, he has bachelor's and master's degrees in political science.

Treasurer

Linda Dono, special projects editor at Gannett News Service, came to Washington in 2000 as a regional editor after working at papers in Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio and Nevada. While at The Cincinnati Enquirer, she won the Associated Press Society of Ohio's First Amendment award for her reporting on Cold War era radiation experimentation at the predecessor to Cincinnati's University Hospital. She moved West to The Reno Gazette-Journal as an assistant city editor to develop the paper's computer-assisted reporting program and became city editor, supervising several projects that received honors from the Nevada Press Association and Associated Press News Executives Council for California and Nevada. While at GNS in Washington, she has helped several reporters she supervised win Gannett quarterly Well Done awards.

The rest of the board

Bruce Alpert, New Orleans Times-Picayune.
 Ian Bishop, New York Post.
 Stephen Crane, the University of Maryland
 Todd Gillman, Dallas Morning News
 Marc Heller, Watertown Daily Times
 Anita Kumar, St. Petersburg Times
 Paul Krawzak, Copley News Service
 Jake Thompson, Omaha World Herald
 Jessica Wehrman, Dayton Daily News

