

# Faith

Gulf Breeze NEWS



## St. Ann Parish remembers Ivan

LIBBI CROWE  
Special to Gulf Breeze News  
news@gulfbreezenews.com

Two years after Hurricane Ivan, the north door to the Family Life Center at St. Ann Catholic Church is still referred to as "The FEMA Door" by parishioners and staff.

Almost as soon as the skies cleared after Hurricane Ivan struck the Gulf Coast on September 16, 2004, federal and state recovery efforts to assist the hard-hit area of Pensacola and surrounding counties began at many churches in Gulf Breeze, including St. Ann Catholic Church on Daniel Drive.

From signing an agreement to allow the city, the State of Florida, and the federal government use St. Ann's Family Life Center gymnasium to be a disaster recovery center, to presentations by the Avery Center and complimentary community dinners, the members of St. Ann Catholic Church and Our Lady of the Assumption, Pensacola Beach reached out to the community in as many ways as they could think of. Volunteers from all over the area joined the effort as Gulf Breeze began to put itself back together.

And, even now people stop Parish Administrator Susie Spencer to comment on that time.

**Shock and awe**  
Spencer remembers the shock of those first days. She had traveled to Kentucky before the storm for a family wedding; she had to stay there until the Pensacola airport reopened. Keeping up with events by phone still didn't prepare her for the reality when she got back about 9:15 a.m. September 23, she said.

"My car, plus one other, were the only ones in the airport parking lot. It started up, wasn't damaged, so I thought, positively, all was OK. So I left the airport and drove straight to St. Ann, and as I walked in, it was a picture of chaos," Spencer said.

The church had readily agreed when contacted by the City of Gulf Breeze to offer their Family Life Center to the government for a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Recovery Center. The Rev. Msgr. Luke Hunt, pastor, had gone forward with the FEMA center, commenting, "How can we not help our community?" As for the costs, he said, "The Lord will provide."

"And He did," Spencer said. "That day was hectic, hot, chaotic as I introduced myself and what role I would play for them to the many people there and ensuring they knew we at St. Ann would do everything possible."

As Spencer walked in, the state and federal agencies were moving in chairs, tables, computers, and more to get set up as the FEMA Center. The center



Submitted Photo

Our Lady of the Assumption volunteer Beverly Pica shares information with hurricane victims Lois Muller and Peggy Vansleen (holding 4-month-old daughter Lilly with 3-year-old son Benjamin standing by) in line to meet with agency personnel within FEMA Disaster Recovery Center Monday, October 26, 2004.

was open from 8 a.m. - 7 p.m. daily for several months, with a rotation of committed St. Ann staff members available 24 hours a day.

**Finding the strength**  
Shannon Gottstine, now Faith Formation Director at the parish, was a brand new parishioner in September 2004. She was one of the many volunteers working at the church during that time.

"We were living out at the beach while our house was being built," Gottstine said. "So after Ivan we were 'homeless'. We lived in Lillian, Ala., for five months. Since it was such a drive I spent a lot of time at the Church, going to daily Mass, eating breakfast (sometimes lunch) and getting to know the people of St. Ann.

"I saw St. Ann step up and lead this community," Gottstine said. "I saw selflessness on a whole different level. I saw Christ in so many faces, but I will never forget the face of our dear Monsignor Hunt, as he spoke of our parishioner's pain and loss. You could see his genuine compassion, he suffered with them. I guess what I learned from that time was that if we put our trust in the Lord he will sustain us through all of life's difficulties."

"I experienced Christ each day we opened the Center," Spencer said. "In the faces of the emergency and relief workers, so tired after 12 hour days; in the face of the woman coming in after trying to clean up her property, and smiling when she was given a meal and cold drink; in the face of that child who was frightened to leave his Mom so she could fill out her paperwork; in the face of that senior gentleman, holding his wife's hand, trying not to cry, asking me if he knew what they were going to do now."

Within the Disaster Recovery Center, victims had access to FEMA, the Small Business Administration (SBA),

Unemployment, Elderly Affairs, Army Corps of Engineers' Operation Blue Roof, Legal Affairs, the Social Security Administration and Children and Families Services and several other federal and state agencies. Another area within the center was dedicated to Catholic Charities personnel, who committed their staff for longer-term counseling and determining additional resources available to victims locally. Parishioners and staff from St. Ann, their mission church Our Lady, St. Paul, St. Sylvester, many other churches and the community supported FEMA's efforts daily by greeting hurricane victims, providing refreshment and serving hot breakfasts and lunches to victims in need and to the relief workers themselves. Free dinners were served at the weekly Wednesday night Family Night Dinners in the church's parish hall.

Other counseling opportunities were available to the community at the church including three Avery Group counseling sessions focusing on strategies and skills for coping with the stress of Hurricane Ivan. Emerald Coast Hospice Bereavement Coordinator Ronnie Gonzalez presented a coping with grief seminar over the holidays at the church.

All this was the beginning of today's Interfaith Disaster Resources, where Gulf Breeze churches and the city have formed a partnership to respond to future disasters.

**Lessons Learned**  
Spencer said one particularly exhausting day, a man came up to her and said that she had given him a tuna sandwich and a cold drink a few weeks earlier. In return he handed her a check for \$10,000 to help the church in this mission.

"God is good!" Spencer said. "I cried . . . not only from exhaustion, but from this man's touching generosity." She said

other lessons learned included that the Gulf Breeze community is basically good, and that the aftermath was an opportunity to practice the innate virtues of kindness and compassion.

"I admit I could have done a much better job handling the staff distress," Spencer said, "and that is one lesson I learned, and I believe we have all learned, since forming the Interfaith Disaster Resources group. I learned that all of us have our limits, but that God will provide for what we need in any way.

"I learned that we cannot do it all by ourselves, so with the City, other agencies and churches forming the Interfaith Disaster Resources Group, we are much better prepared for the next crisis," Spencer said. "I experienced the kindness and generosity of all God's people who supported our effort, in time, talent and their financial contributions, and that makes my heart sing!"

St. Ann Catholic Church, Gulf Breeze, and Our Lady of the Assumption Mission, Pensacola Beach, together are a parish of over 2,000 persons serving the community in body, mind and spirit. Information, bulletins and newsletters are available on the web at StAnnGulfBreeze.Org.

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**Request For Proposals**  
**The ZOO – Northwest Florida**  
July 15, 2006

As of July 2006, The ZOO – Northwest Florida (The ZOO) is issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a compatible development of its U.S. Highway 98 frontage property at 5701 Gulf Breeze Parkway, Gulf Breeze, FL 32563.

The considered property is approximately 1300 linear feet of highway frontage and approximately 300 feet deep; up to 390,000 square feet or 8.6 acres. The property is zoned PBD; lease or purchase will be considered.

The ZOO prefers and is most interested in an "International Village Market" motif and boutique style retail and restaurant development at street level along with upper story spaces designed for additional retail, services vendors, offices and apartment housing. It is envisioned that the village-style development will create a visually impressive, intriguing and unique atmosphere to help establish and grow, in conjunction with The ZOO, a regional end-point family recreation, shopping and dining destination complex for residents and visitors alike. To carry on with an integrated zoological park atmosphere, open and covered walkways and decks, landscaped with water features, fountains and plantings, will connect the various eateries, retail, office, parking and residential elements of the property.

Proposals will be entertained and reviewed through September 31, 2006. Interested parties please submit Proposals to the offices of the:

**Executive Director, Gulf Coast Zoological Society**  
The ZOO, Northwest Florida  
5701 Gulf Breeze Parkway  
Gulf Breeze, FL 32563

## OUR TROOPS

**SEARS**  
Air Force Airman Robert W. Sears has graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.



In addition, airmen who complete basic training earn credits toward an associate degree through the Community College of the Air Force.

He is the son of Dennis Sears of Cypress Point Circle, Navarre, Fla. Sears is a 2004 graduate of Navarre High School.

**WILSON**  
Air Force Airman Justin R. Wilson has graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.

During the six weeks of training, the airman studied the Air Force mission, organization, and military customs and courtesies; performed drill and ceremony marches, and received physical training, rifle marksmanship, field training exercises, and special training in human relations.

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In addition, airmen who complete basic training earn credits toward an associate degree through the Community College of the Air Force.

He is the son of James Wilson of River Run Road, Navarre, Fla.

Wilson is a 2005 graduate of Navarre High School.



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