

Haven in the Hurricane

Hurricane Charley brought the cream to the top at Life Care Center of Winter Haven. That was the assessment of Ralph M. Jacobs, the executive director of another of the Life Care facilities that lay in the direct path of a devastating, Class 4 hurricane that ripped across the Florida peninsula on Friday, August 13.

"Much of our staff put their residents' best interests before theirs and their families," Jacobs said. "All of us had families and homes in jeopardy from the storm, and they chose to be here to be with their residents. These residents are very fortunate."

Here are other observations Jacobs made:

"We saw environmental services staff running from one end of the building to the other to help with water control. Maintenance staff was doing whatever was needed to be done, including going outside during the brunt of the storm to protect their residents. These departments took their cue from their leaders, who were everywhere and never left the building.

"We saw dietary staff doing what they had to do to feed the residents, even under circumstances when we lost even our emergency generator and were in total darkness with no power. They were in the dishroom during the most fierce part of the storm washing dishes by hand while an aide held one little flashlight. Did they yell for help or complain? No. They were just doing what they needed to do. The next day, when many had extreme damage to their homes, guess where they were. Back in the kitchen getting breakfast ready for their residents. Our dietician was right in the middle of the whole fracas pitching in with her usual determination that we all know and respect so much.

"Nursing staff was absolutely fabulous. These associates constantly assured residents that everything was fine and under control. They tended to the residents' needs as if nothing was occurring, even though winds were in excess of 125 miles per hour. Nursing staff stayed over to help and came in when it was not easy to get here. Nursing staff even went above and beyond by helping to keep children occupied. Nursing staff showed what they are made of and they are made of some pretty good stuff. We are proud of each and every one of them that stuck with their residents throughout the whole ordeal. Their leaders set a great example by being here and pitching in.

"Social services and activities departments went above and beyond in helping their residents, even though their families were on the other side of the county and they lost homes and personal belongings. They make you proud to be associated with them.

"Last but not least is our management team. I have been doing this sort of thing for 35 years now. I could not be prouder of anyone than I am of this group. It is a very young group, with the exception of me, but they are mature beyond their years. Their commitment and dedication are second to none. Most of them were here from 8 a.m.

(more)

Friday (August 13) to almost midnight Saturday (August 14).

"In the aftermath of Charley, we paused to admit 15 residents from our Punta Gorda building, which was severely damaged in the storm. We were tired, hungry, irritable and grouchy, but we admitted those residents like clockwork. Our nursing staff responded as if it was routine to admit 15 residents in the course of a couple of hours.

"Our management team is a group of highly skilled professionals who care so much about what they are doing. They are perfect role models for anyone who yearns to become a manager. I have studied management for six years and received two degrees in it. But I have learned so much from my management team, and most of it is not in books. These are special people who deserve for the Power above to watch over them so that they can live long lives and raise many children to be like them."

That was Ralph Jacobs' evaluation of what happened in the fury of Hurricane Charley and in its wake. Once again, the associates of Life Care Center of Winter Haven have proven that Life Care is a family, proud of its calling and committed to the mission of serving its residents. What nobler work can there be on this earth?

--Beecher Hunter