

NOAA, FEMA alliance keeps Gulf fishing afloat after Katrina

■ Volunteers discuss cleanup efforts following the 2005 hurricane's devastation

BY MEREDITH HOOKER
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Today, Plaquemines Parish in Louisiana is one of the only ports along the Gulf Coast that's up and running following the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina and Tropical Storm Rita last year.

Nancy and Wayne Weikel, two Federal Emergency Management Agency volunteers and agents from

the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's Sea Grant program, discussed their partnership in the cleanup of that area at NOAA's Silver Spring headquarters Thursday. NOAA's Sea Grant is a university-based program that supports coastal resource use and conservation.

The damage Katrina and Rita caused was devastating, particularly to the fisheries along the Gulf Coast,

Weikel said. The Weikels and the Sea Grant agents worked to rebuild the fisheries — the livelihood for many residents.

"Katrina came through with a vengeance," Nancy Weikel said, describing clogged waterways, destroyed icehouses and damaged vessels.

"I call them the unheard victims," she said of the fishermen.

Together, the Weikels and Rusty Gaudé, NOAA's Sea Grant agent in Plaquemines, St. Bernard and Orleans parishes, worked for nearly 200 days to be the voice of the fishing industry. The fishermen needed docks and debris-free waterways, Wayne Weikel said. The Coast Guard helped clear the waterways.

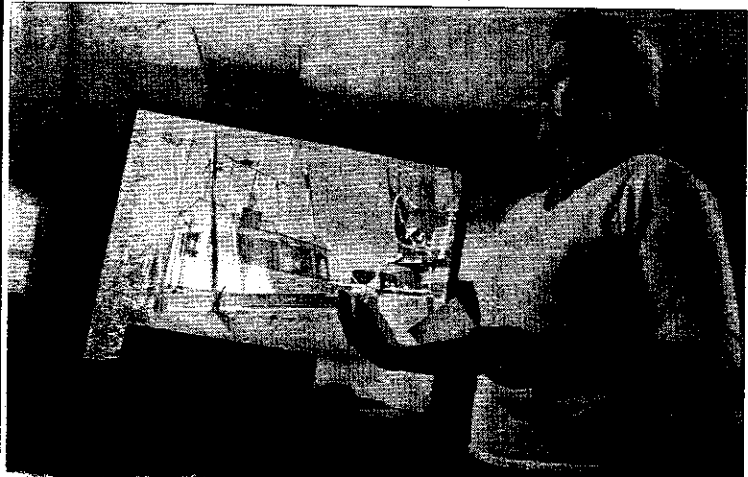
That teamwork was important, Wayne Weikel said, because they were able to work to evaluate needs and help the fishermen lobby the government.

They focused on getting boats back in the water, Gaudé said, and getting icehouses running. Their partnership worked, he said, and they believe FEMA should use it as a model in future disaster situations.

"We spoke with one voice," Gaudé said.

Other organizations around the country also banded together to help Gaudé and the Weikels, said Eric Olson, who works with the Sea Grant program in Seattle, Wash. Together, several organizations sent a lift to the parish to raise boats out of the water so they could be repaired.

"To this day, Plaquemines Parish is the only parish to restart by the next season. ... The other parishes are still sitting, looking almost post-Katrina," Wayne Weikel said.



CHARLIE SHOEMAKER/THE GAZETTE

Nancy Weikel, a volunteer with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, discusses her experience in a cleanup effort of Plaquemines Parish in Louisiana following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.



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At a discussion held Thursday at the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration in Silver Spring, Rusty Gaudé, NOAA's Sea Grant agent in Plaquemines, St. Bernard and Orleans parishes in Louisiana, answers questions Thursday about his role as the voice for the fishing industry following Hurricane Katrina.