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HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
HOBOKEN STORIES:
REMEMBERING STORM SANDY

INTERVIEWEE: TOM MOLTA

INTERVIEWER: EILEEN LYNCH

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EL: This is Eileen Lynch, and I'm speaking with Tom Molta. He is the president of the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance Corps. Tom let's get started. One of the things I want to ask you to talk about is when you first became aware that there was going to be a giant storm, and what were some of the preparations, if any, that the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance Corps started to take.

TM: Our first notification was probably the Tuesday or Wednesday prior to the storm. We were following the weather forecast. It started to ramp up, and we saw that -- they were saying that we were probably going to get a direct hit. The first thing we did was we made sure that all three of our ambulances were in working order. The medical vendor that we deal with for our supplies is [Unclear], right here in "Kearny," so we had ordered additional supplies. We overstocked our ambulances

somewhat. We also had our Special Operations team come in the Thursday before. We made sure all our tents were in working order; we made sure that all our oxygen was filled. Standard preparation. In our building, we made sure that we had battery-powered flashlights issued to our members, in the event of power failures. As it started to get closer, we were included in all of the meetings with the city -- with the Office of Emergency Management, the mayor, and you started to see, as -- a lot of people, having gone through Irene the year before -- a lot of people were like, "Well, yeah, they said there was going to be this big storm, and [unclear] it was a washout. Some people got flooded, but it was nowhere near the magnitude they said it was going to be." As it started to get closer, following the weather reports, it was like, "This is going to be the real deal. This isn't going to be a near-miss; this is going to be the real deal. This is the direct hit. This is the hurricane they've been talking about for fifty years, that's finally going to be in this general area."

One of the biggest concerns during all those meetings -- we're accustomed to flooding. Hoboken has had a history of flooding, so we're accustomed to the flooding. It's the storm surge. When they started talking about twelve-, fourteen-, eighteen-foot storm surges, it was

like, "Hoboken is going to be inundated with water." We had made some provisions that in the event we had to evacuate our building, we had already made arrangements that we would have to go to high ground. So we were going to take refuge, and run our operation possibly out of City Hall -- never expecting it to get to the magnitude that it did (and I'll talk about that later). We ultimately ended up in Stevens Institute of Technology. We didn't just evacuate; we bumped out of our building.

EL: Did 707 get flooded?

TM: Oh, my god. Our main floor was blown in by the water. We had five and a half feet of water in our building.

EL: Wow. At 707 Clinton.

TM: At 707 Clinton Street, in our headquarters. And in the thirty-three years that I'm a member there, we never had water come in from the outside. That's the first time we ever had outside water come in. With some of the flooding, we've had our sewer drain back up, and we pushed it out of the building. But we've never

had water from the outside come in -- and it literally blew in a bay, our wooden bay door. It shattered it like toothpicks.

We had also been in contact with the hospital, because that area, again, was prone to flooding. They had evacuated the hospital during Irene, and they were able to return those patients in 2011; they were able to return those patients within a day or two, because the hospital really didn't sustain that significant of damage. We were able to reopen our ER, I think, in thirty-six hours after the storm.

EL: After Irene.

TM: After Irene. With this storm, they waited, they waited, and our operation actually started on Sunday, the 28th of October, because Angelo Caprio, who is the Disaster Services OEM -- Officer of Emergency Management -- for the hospital -- he turned around and said, "We need to evacuate the hospital."

That was pretty much the prep of it, and our operation, as we were still preparing for -- knowing the storm was coming on Monday -- as we were still preparing,

we kind of got put into action because the hospital pulled the trigger and said, "We need to evacuate."

EL: So the Hoboken Volunteers assisted with that.

TM: The Hoboken Volunteers was the coordinating EMS agency for the evacuation. The way it works is, we need to call the county Office of Emergency Management -- EMS -- which is the emergency medical services coordinator, and that is Mickey McCabe from Bayonne. Then he, through his channels in the Office of Emergency Management, on a state level, he was able to contact multiple ambulances and a coordination team that sat with us. It's a big undertaking to evacuate 138 people. They're already ill. You have to find a facility that's going to take them. Certain patients have to go to certain hospitals. So it was almost a twelve-hour event.

We started moving the first patient I would say about 6:00 in the evening --

EL: -- on Sunday?

TM: -- on Sunday, 6:00 in the evening on Sunday, which was the 28th of October. We finished up about 4:00-4:30 in the morning. I told everybody at that point, "Go home. Get a couple hours of sleep. Tomorrow's going to be a long day," never, ever thinking it was going to be what it was.

We brought a lot of people back on Monday morning. I was doing some riding around with the Ambulance Corps chief's car, and at the first high-tide on Monday morning, I had gone up to the waterfront. And I was like, "Wow. I've never seen the river like this." The river was angry. I couldn't believe it. It looked like the Atlantic Ocean, it really did.

EL: All white caps.

TM: White caps, and --

EL: And the wind is coming from -- you know the storm is coming from [unclear]. I felt it was like a science fiction movie down there. This is going to be bad.

TM: It was awesome. I have a newfound respect for the power of water. But it was absolutely

breathhtaking to see the river like that. The river had come over a little bit in the morning high-tide, down around the PATH station area. There was a little flooding, but cars could still go through it if they had to. The police were keeping everybody back. I was talking to a couple police officers and saying, "This doesn't look good." He turned around and he goes, "I was here for Irene, and it didn't look anything like that." I said, "Yeah, I agree with you."

So we had gone back to our building, and we had made provisions for 15:00 hours -- which is 3:00 in the afternoon. That's when we were going to start staffing additional ambulances and our Special Ops. Everything was going to be up and running.

EL: On this Monday.

TM: On Monday the 29th. We were sitting in the building. All in all, with the entire storm, it didn't really rain that much. We were waiting for the torrential downpours. It never came to that. It was raining, there was some minor flooding, but the wind started to pick up. Later in the afternoon, the wind started to pick up. We had our three ambulances, and Hoboken High School also has an ambulance. They had mobilized their personnel, so we had an

ambulance from the high school in our building. We were manning four ambulances at the time, with the anticipation that the 3:00 crews would go off at midnight. Then at midnight we were going to do twelve-hour operational periods, so the next crew would be on from midnight until noon.

Well, that never happened.

EL: Those people couldn't get in.

TM: The guys who were in our building just kept going, and going, and going. If you asked me what happened Monday -- I could tell you what happened Monday, because that was the starting date. But if you asked me exactly what happened Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, I couldn't tell you exact dates and times, because, to me, it was just one run-on day. It never ended; it was ongoing.

About 5:30-6:00 in the evening, on Monday the 29th, one of the first calls -- the wind was really starting to pick up. At that time of year, it was just getting dark at 6:00. The first call that came in was a report of an overturned construction trailer at Fifteenth and Washington Streets, with a man trapped underneath. So one of the ambulances was dispatched.

EL: Was it in that parking lot?

TM: The construction lot across from the [Unclear] building. That had a construction trailer. We had noticed a spike in our call volume from 2:00 in the afternoon. We were starting to see the ambulances getting more calls than they normally would, and there were a lot of people who still thought Hoboken University Medical Center was open. So I think what they were thinking was, "It's probably better if I get in an ambulance and go to the hospital. I'll be safer in the hospital than I will be at home." But then we had to tell them that Hoboken University closed. At that point, we were still able to get in and out of Hoboken, so we were starting to distribute patients. First we went to Jersey City Medical Center. Then we went to [Unclear]. Then we went to Palisades General. You try not to overflow one hospital.

As I said, this distress call comes in for the overturned construction trailer with the man in it, a victim in it, and the police had said on the radio -- we get dispatched by the police department. They said, "We don't have any police officers to send. You're on your own. Let us know what you've got when you get there." So the

ambulance responded, and myself and the captain -- his name is Mark Harris -- we responded in the chief's car. The construction trailer itself was up on cinder blocks, and it had been knocked off the cinder blocks.

EL: By the water?

TM: By the wind. So one side of it was off the blocks, and the other side was still up on the blocks. Mark said, "I'm going to go see if there's anybody in there." So I kept the crew back from the ambulance, and I had a flashlight. We had these big Rands. I had a big Rand, and I said, "I'll stay at the fence. This way you can see the light from my beam, so you can get back out." As he went over the fence, to head toward the trailer, a gust of wind came up and picked up a twenty-foot-long, eight-foot-wide, twelve-foot-high construction trailer. It picked it up and turned it upside down. I can't gauge wind, but it had to be eighty miles an hour if not more. It moved us. Where we were standing, it pushed us. It just moved you. There was no way you can fight this; it just moved you. Like I could move this chair, that's how the wind moved you. So I screamed a couple of expletives: "Mark, get the *** out of there!" He says, "Let me see if he's in there."

I said, "If he's in there, he's dead. If he's in there, he's already dead." Well, he made it to the trailer, he looked in the windows, and thank god, the trailer was empty. It was a night watchman; he had bailed out. I said, "Come on. We've got to get out of there."

While all this is going on, we didn't even realize that just maybe -- it was dark now. Maybe 500 feet north of us there was a raging river on Hudson Street and Washington Street. The water was white caps -- white caps, in the city streets --

EL: -- from the cove.

TM: -- coming right over the cove. That's where it was coming in from. I looked at Mark and I said, "We've got to get back to the building." So we took the crew, we went back, and my wife -- when we got back to the building we were listening to the police radio, and they started saying, "Here it comes. Observer Highway being taken over by the Hudson River. Newark Street is impassable." It was just getting worse and worse. "Sinatra Drive is underwater. Nobody can get near Sinatra Drive." So my wife called me. I live right across street from the hospital. I lived in 10 Church Towers. So when I look out

my living-room window, I look at the emergency room driveway. My wife says to me, "Tommy, you can't believe this. Fourth Street is a raging river. There is water coming down Fourth Street with white caps on it; it's actually moving the parked cars." And that's only three blocks from the Ambulance Corps. So I said to her, "You guys are safe." They're on the seventh floor. I said, "You guys are safe. Anticipate the power going out, but just stay put. I'll be in touch [unclear]."

EL: At this point we still had power.

TM: Yes.

So I looked at the captain, and Mark and I worked -- I felt like I was married to him for a week! [Laughs] We were together more than we were with our families. I looked at Mark and I said, "Four streets impassable, and it's coming this way. We have to make a decision. Are we staying or are we going?" He turned around and said, "I think we better go." He said, "Because look." I said, "What?" He said, "Come here." He was standing at the threshold to the door. When we looked down Clinton Street, the A&P parking lot was underwater. It actually had current to it; it was moving water. Swift water. We call

it, in the rescue business, swift water. It was swift water.

So we got our members -- we had thirty-seven people in the building, including Mark and myself, and we told them, "We're bailing out. Get everything you can possibly carry, load it in an ambulance, and go to Ninth and Washington Street. We'll figure out where we're going from there." We had nowhere to go. We're going to high ground.

So the guys did the best they could. They grabbed whatever they could. We did a head count. One of our other officers, whose name is David Docherty -- he's one of my lieutenants -- Doch, myself, and Mark, the captain, stayed at the building. We got everybody out into the vehicles, and I said, "All right. Here's what I want you to do. Doch, you go to the third floor. Sweep the third floor, make sure there's nobody up there. Mark, you go to the second floor. Make sure there's nobody left in the building." They ran up, they cleared the building, they came down, and I said, "Okay. Now you two guys stay right here." I went up, I did a secondary, to make sure there was nobody in the building. I said, "All right, you guys get in the vehicle." We actually killed our own power in the

building, figuring it would go out anyway, but we would protect the computers and stuff. We shut down the power.

So we killed our own power, and we closed the door to the Ambulance Corps, and we were like homeless. We got in our chief's car, and we met the other ambulances up on Ninth and Washington. By this time it was raining a little harder, and the rain was coming down sideways. The rain hurt. When it hit you, it actually hurt. You were being pelted, and you could start hearing and seeing the transformers popping all over time. So Doch turns around and he goes, "What about Stevens?"

EL: As a place to put yourselves.

TM: We were contemplating, in the vehicle, in the chief's car, "Where are we going to go? We can't stay in the middle of Ninth and Washington." And City Hall, at that point -- that was where the emergency operation center was. There was a lot of activity going on down there. The last thing they needed was ambulances parked all around City Hall. So we said, "Well, you know what? It's worth a shot. Let's go up there." We went the wrong way up Eighth Street, with the whole contingent of ambulances. There was a Stevens police officer coming down Eighth

Street when he saw us all coming up. He's a friend of ours; we know him. His name is Junior. He got out of the car and he went like this to me. He said, "Tommy. What's going on?" And I said, "We got no building. It's underwater. Is there anywhere we can stage these ambulances?" He says, "I've got one better than that. Let me make a call." He got in his radio car, he went on the radio, and he says, "All right, they're opening up the Shaffer Gym for you guys." I'm sorry. The Walker Gym. We were in the Walker Gym. He says, "They're opening up the Walker Gym for you guys. You guys stay there as long as you need to."

EL Wow. That was great.

TM: [Unclear] We had two means of egress, in and out. It was a big, open space. The only downside was it didn't have backup power, so the lights had gone out up there at this point. While we were staying up at Stevens, again -- you're almost star struck. We were looking out from Stevens, which is high ground, obviously -- we're looking out over Hoboken, and Jersey City, and Union City, and you could see the blue flashes going off all over the place. The wind is howling, and explosions going off, and there's no lights.

EL: The transformers.

TM: Yeah -- and no lights.

Mark and I had gotten called down to the emergency operation center to have a meeting -- because now it was starting to get really bad. By now it's about 9:30-10:00 on Monday night, into Tuesday, and the fire department had lost all their communications. Because when Stevens Institute went out, the backup generators didn't kick right in. A couple of our guys are comms guys.

EL: What is "comms" guys?

TM: Communications technicians, and ham radio operators. Actually, one of the guys who was already interviewed -- Lou Casciano -- Lou and another member of the Ambulance Corps, Alex Chadis went to Stevens, to try to get the fire department repeater back up and running. They went there with a generator and a bunch of tools, to see what they could do to get it up. So I guess we spent about two or three hours at the emergency operations center, and then we went back to Stevens. When we got back to Stevens, Dave Docherty and another lieutenant, Michael Bruno, had

transformed this gym into a "cached" collection point; a triage area.

EL: A place to actually bring people?

TM: Because, at this point, now, it was impassable to get out of Hoboken to a hospital.

So, while all this is going on, we're in the emergency operation center, and we hear one of our ambulances get dispatched to a call. They said, "All right." I don't remember -- the call sign was probably 134. They said, "One-three-four. We're going to be transporting a male victim to -- we'll try and make Christ Hospital. He's having an MI." An MI is a myocardial infarction; it's a heart attack. He said, "He is actively having an MI right now."

EL: And this was Hoboken.

TM: It was a Hoboken call, and they were trying to get to Christ Hospital. So they were driving the ambulance down Second Street, and Second Street, between Bloomfield and Garden -- there was water, but not a lot at this point. They got down between Garden and Park, the

water was a little deeper, and when they got down to the Willow Avenue block, the water was to the hubcaps on the ambulance. So the driver of the ambulance had his driver's-side window open to let a cross-breeze through, so the windows wouldn't fog over on him. When he got to the intersection of Second and Clinton, something caught his attention, and when he turned his eyes to the left, there was a literal tidal wave coming down the street that just overtook the ambulance. The water came right in through the driver's window, and filled the ambulance with water.

Now they've got a patient in the back, having a heart attack. So the four members who were on the ambulance -- one of them, his name is Brandon Escobar -- he did two tours in Iraq, so he was accustomed to dangerous situations. He said, "Okay." He got on the radio and he said, "One-three-four. We've been overtaken by the water. We're in the water -- literally. We have a patient. We need emergency evacuation. You're going to need a boat to get o us. We're stuck on Second Street between Clinton and Grand. There's no way out. The water has overtaken the ambulance, and we're evacuating our patient. We've got a floater."

So they took a backboard (backboards will float), they slid a backboard under this -- now, mind, you, he's *having a heart attack*. They slid a backboard

underneath him, secured him to the backboard. The four members were about chest-deep in water. They slid him out of the ambulance, and had him up over their heads, on their shoulders, trying to manipulate him out. The fire department made it a priority call, obviously, and the rescue company actually went there with a boat. So when they got there, they took the now-boarded heart-attack patient, put him in the boat, and then the boat had to bring him to Third and Park Avenue. That was the nearest place we could get an ambulance.

Now, mind you, we've lost one of our ambulances. The other ambulance meets them at Third and Park Avenue. Now our four members are drenched. They need to be taken care of, and they need to do something with this gentleman -- who, at this point, now, is going into hypothermia on top of -- because he's wet -- he's going into hypothermia on top of having a heart attack.

EL: Oh, my god.

TM: So they couldn't even get him to the "cache" collection point we had established at Stevens. They wound up bringing him to police headquarters, on First and Hudson --

EL: -- because that was closer.

TM: They bring him up to police headquarters; they bring him in, and the cops at police headquarters -- they have no power. They're working with battery-powered lanterns. The only power they had supplied the radio system, and they said, "Well, what are we going to do with him here? We've got to get him out of here. We've got to find a way to get him to a hospital. Otherwise, he's going to die."

So one of the cops said, "Let me go try to find a way out of town for you." They literally stripped this poor guy naked, in the middle of police headquarters. There were blankets there. They wound up getting the wet clothes off of him --

EL: -- and wrapped him up.

TM: They wrapped him up. Now, at this point, they're running out of oxygen -- because he's been on oxygen now for forty-five minutes -- almost an hour. Ultimately, they were able to get him back in the ambulance. They took him off the backboard, they sat him on

a stretcher, which is a lot more comfortable than being on a board. They got him in an ambulance, and the police department found a way that took them down to Washington Street, that took them literally right down the center of Washington Street, with water flooding on both sides. It was passable, but they had to go down the center of Washington. I think they made the turn on Eleventh, and they had to go through the Malibu parking lot to avoid the puddles. Then they had to get to the far side of the viaduct, off Fourteenth Street, and once you got up the viaduct the water was coming down, so it wasn't bad. Once they got out of that area, they were able to get up to Christ Hospital and deliver the patient. After all he had been through -- and this gentleman had a history of cardiac -- after all he had been through, he survived. The four members -- Tyrone Huggins, Brandon Escobar, Valentina Miangolarra, and Damar Grant -- they were the first four members in the history of the Ambulance Corps, since 1971, they were the first four members ever to receive the Medal of Honor -- which is the criteria to receive -- we give awards to our members, and the criteria to receive the Medal of Honor is you have to put your own life in danger for your patient. With that, the four of them almost drowned. They almost drowned. There was no doubt about it.

EL: Just walking through that water.

TM: They could have fallen through an open manhole.

EL: They could have had a cut -- who knows?

TM: Well, that was the other thing, too. All of our guys were out there in waist-deep water, at any given time. Were you in Hoboken during that? There was sewage. There was gasoline, petroleum products -- you had diesel fuel, oil, floating on the water. While all this was going on, we lost another ambulance. We lost a second unit, so now we were down to two ambulances. Yeah. It was overtaken by water, parked at a call. They parked it at the call, and when they came out they couldn't get out of the building. They had to send a pay-loader, a bucket truck, to get them.

There were other calls coming into the emergency operations center, and into our comms center. A woman waited ten hours for an ambulance at 310 Jackson Street. She had difficulty breathing, and we just couldn't get to her. You just couldn't get there.

EL: Yes. Because that was bad back there.

TM: Oh, my god. Ten-twelve-feet deep. Excuse me. When she finally got an ambulance on Tuesday -- she had been calling since Monday night, for chest pains and difficulty breathing. We finally got an ambulance to her on Tuesday, and they had, literally, a pay-loader, a bucket loader -- we put two EMTs in the bucket loader, with a stair chair and a first-aid jump bag, with oxygen. The pay-loader was towing a small boat. They brought them to the building, and raised the bucket to the second-floor hallway window, where our crew members got off the bucket, climbed in the second-floor window -- she happened to be on seven. So they walked up the five flights of stairs, got her, brought her down five flights of stairs in a stair-chair, loaded her into the pay-loader with the EMTs. The pay-loader turned around, brought the bucket down, they took her from the bucket to the boat, and then had her take the boat to Third and Park.

For some reason, Third and Park Avenue became our launch point, for the boats. It was just the way the water flooded in Hoboken: It was a great place to launch a boat, and it was a great place to bring a boat

back to. So we were able to get an ambulance in on Third and Park, and keep taking them out from there. But she ultimately ended up going, like I said, from the bucket-loader into the boat; from the boat to Third and Park Avenue; and it wasn't like --

EL: -- to an ambulance at Third and Park.

TM: -- to an ambulance, yeah. But it wasn't like you were rowing the boat, or it wasn't that people had a rope and they were pulling the boat. These boats had motors. There was enough water that you were able to use a motor. It was deep enough that you could drive a boat from 310 or 320 Jackson Street -- one or the other -- all the way to Third and Park Avenue. We did over 850 calls in a ten-day period.

EL: Were most of them heart attacks, trouble breathing? I would imagine there would be a lot of anxiety out there.

TM: I was just going to say -- there was a tone of anxiety. There were a lot of people -- there's a class that we take in ongoing training. It's called "Sick-

Non-Sick." It teaches you how to evaluate a patient. Are they really, really sick? Or are they not that sick? One of the things we were noticing was a lot of anxiety attacks. I didn't know there were so many people in Hoboken on in-home oxygen. A lot of them don't have regular oxygen bottles, they have what they call oxygen generators, powered by electricity. So people were calling, saying, "I need my oxygen. I have no power." High-rise buildings -- no elevators. Hallways were pitch-black in the middle of the day, and we were taking these people down -- we initially tried to bring them to the "cache" collection point --

EL: -- up at Stevens.

TM: -- at Stevens, to leave them on oxygen. But our generators -- we were using portable generators. They couldn't handle the load. So we ultimately started having to take these people to -- Christ Hospital was the only hospital that was open. Jersey City Medical Center flooded out. We couldn't get out of town to go to Palisades General. So Christ Hospital was receiving not only all of Hoboken's ambulances, but the majority of Jersey City's ambulances, Union City, West New York, Weehawken -- they had beds in Christ Hospital lined up down the hall for as

far as you could see. I think we must have brought 300 people there. We had 850 calls. A lot of them we brought to the "cache" collection point. And, again, with that Sick/Not-Sick theory -- if we could bring them to the "cache" collection point and leave them on oxygen for a little while, get them a hot meal -- a lot of these people hadn't had food in two days. A lot of diabetics -- diabetics not making proper provision for food in their home; or, again, Lou was instrumental -- the CERT team and Lou, when it came to getting these people their prescriptions -- insulin was a big, big thing. Who didn't make provision to have their insulin? You're a diabetic, you need their insulin. Not their fault; they just didn't think it was going to be all that bad.

But was not just the hurricane. There were so many other factors that came into play. You never realize how much you depend upon electricity until you don't have it. Your whole life depends on electrics, and EMS -- the ambulance -- everything is electric. We plug the ambulances in, because we charge our suction units; we charge our defibrillators; we have to charge our radios. We were relying on generator power; then fuel became a concern. Now the ambulances are starting to run low on fuel. We were getting fuel wherever we could. One of our

special services units -- one of the generators we were using was a diesel generator. We couldn't get diesel fuel. The vehicle they had brought to Stevens, that carried the equipment, that was able to make the casualty collection point -- Mark and I again -- said, "Well, that's not moving for a while." He said, "Yeah." I said, "I've got an idea." We got two five-gallon Gatorade containers, that we were never going to use again (coolers), and I said to him, "Do you want to do it, or should I?"

Now I'm fifty. Mark's younger than me. He looked and said, "Do what?" I said, "You have no idea what I'm going to do, huh?" He's like, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well, all right. I guess it's me. Then tag, I'm it." We call it suction tubing, but it's basically like an old-fashioned hose. I opened the diesel tank, stuck it in, and said, "This is how you siphon fuel." I got a mouthful of diesel fuel, [laughter] I put the thing in, and now you're watching diesel fuel trickle out to these five-gallon containers. Thank god for that truck; it had seventy-five gallons of diesel fuel on it. It became our fuel depot. We were taking the fuel out of there and putting it into diesel ambulances. That's how bad it got -- that we were stealing from Peter to pay Paul.

Then I guess it was Wednesday -- I'm shooting from the hip on this. I think it was Wednesday, Wednesday or Thursday -- it caught up to me. One of the lieutenants -- Mike -- says to me, "You're done." I said, "What do you mean?" He goes, "Tommy. You're like a zombie. You're like the walking dead." I said, "Let me get two hours downtime." We had the gym separated into two distinct areas. We had a casualty-collection point, and then we had an area for our members. A lot of our guys hadn't had a hot meal, they hadn't had a shower in a couple of days.

EL: Why didn't you just walk down to St. Matthew's?

TM: Do you know why? With everything else going on, we didn't even think of it.

What happened was -- there were shower facilities in the next gym over, at Stevens. It's just that they didn't have hot water, and it was in the center of the building, so there were no lights. But a cold, dark shower is better than no shower at all, at this point. [Laughter] But they actually put me down. They said, "All right. You're out. You've got to get some kind of downtime." I

said, "When was the last time you ate?" I said, "I don't remember."

So we were eating MREs -- military -- we were eating MREs, and we were eating pork and beans out of the can; whatever we could get our hands on. When I woke up -- I had really knocked out, and when I woke up there were all these people I didn't recognize, all in yellow jackets. I'm like, "Where did all these bumble bees come from? What the hell is going on here?" So I called, "Mike, get over here." He goes, "Pennsylvania Strike Team." I said, "What?" He said, "The ambulances from Pennsylvania got here, while you were sleeping." We got five ambulances with additional crews that augmented us. Because at this point, you've got to remember -- we were running with two ambulances. Our normal procedure would, obviously, to get "mutual aid." We couldn't get "mutual aid," because everybody else had the same problem we did. We actually did get a couple of ambulances at one point, where we were over on -- "Ampcare" [phonetic] sent us an ambulance or two. Meadowlands Hospital, in Secaucus, had sent us an ambulance or two. But it was sporadic at best. If you call for "mutual aid," they're like, "We've got nothing to send. I'd love to help you, but I've got nothing to send you."

Well, when these guys got there, they turned around and said, "All right. Here's the first thing we're going to do. You guys are going to take twelve hours off. We're going to do your job for twelve hours, so your guys can recoup -- hot showers, whatever you want." They were lifesavers.

EL: Pennsylvania Strike?

TM: It's called the Pennsylvania Emergency Medical Services Strike Team. I still keep in touch with five or six of the people who were there. They were dynamite. They were excellent. Our guys were able to recover, and get themselves -- and at this point, now, whoever was there was there; we couldn't get any additional personnel in. Our guys were able to get some downtime. The guys from Pennsylvania were great. They had their own reliefs. They brought enough people with them that they could relieve themselves. These ambulances were from all over Pennsylvania, some as near as Bristol, in the Philadelphia area, and there were other ones from the Pittsburgh area. There were ambulances from Pennsylvania all over the state of New Jersey, except for like fifty-five ambulances.

EL: That's awesome.

TM: We ended up with five of them in Hoboken. But they were lifesavers. They were the cavalry. I still keep in touch with a few of the guys there. They're really, really nice people.

EL: I didn't realize that.

TM: It's funny. After it was over, they were going back to Pennsylvania. I guess this was about a week and a half later. They were going back to Pennsylvania, and they came to Hoboken. Things were starting to get relatively back to normal, and their big thing was they wanted to go to the Cake Boss; they wanted to see Carlo's Bakery. Carlos was really good to us. Mary was standing in the window; I walked up to her and said, "Listen, these guys helped us out," and she was like, "Come on in." It was great. She took really good care of them.

But the outpouring of support in the community -- when we finally got back into our building -- actually, the first time we got back into our building was on Thursday morning, and we had to go there by boat.

Clinton Street was still flooded, and we had to go there by boat. That was when we realized the damage we had. We knew there was water down there, but it was mind-boggling. Mind-boggling -- that you had to take a boat from Ninth and Clinton to get to 707 Clinton Street. When I saw the door, as soon as I saw the door, I said, "We're screwed. This is not good." We got inside. I had gotten out of the boat, I was probably hip-deep. I'm six-feet tall, I was probably hip-deep. The damage inside -- the electrical panel had exploded. Because even though we killed the power, the water had come in before our transformers blew, so the box is still energized, apparently. Anyway, the box blew. We had racks of oxygen bottles -- that's really what we went back for: more oxygen. The bottles had been lifted up by water. They slid out of the racks, and now the water is starting to recede -- now, mind you, this is four days later, and the water is still up to my hips, and was receding. There were oxygen bottles on the -- we have a stairwell that goes up to the second floor. There were bottles on the sixth and fifth steps -- meaning that they were above that, and as the water started to recede, that's where they stopped. But we had water about five to six feet in different places in our building. Our communications unit, one of our bigger trucks, was in our building, and

when we bugged out, that was one of the vehicles we opted not to take, because it was just another vehicle. If we had moved it, it would have required more manpower. We shipped whatever we could out of it, but the truck was underwater. You could see the watermark climbed -- it was up into the grill. And this was a huge -- it was a bus. It was a twenty-four passenger bus, and the water was up into the grill. We had no electricity. We had no heat. Our hot water heater was in the garage area. That was destroyed. Our garage heater was destroyed.

EL: Let me ask you about how you worked with the city, and the National Guard, and the Red Cross, and all the other organizations that were here.

TM: Well, again, the guys from Pennsylvania were an entity that we worked with. One of the funniest stories about Sandy was -- Mike Nemacc was his name -- he was in charge of -- they sent the supervisor with them, and he was in charge.

EL: Was he from Pennsylvania?

TM: He was from Pennsylvania. His name is Mike Nemacc, and he was in charge of the Pennsylvania Strike Team that was assigned to Hoboken. I says to him, "What do you need from us?" And he looked at me and he goes, "No, no, we're here to support you. What do you need from us?" I said to him, "Have you ever been in a hurricane?" Because these guys go all over the country, doing this. I says, "Have you ever handled a hurricane this big?" He said, "Yeah, but only three." I said, "Well, you know what? That's two more than me. So what do you need us to do?" And he goes, "Oh, we're going to get along just fine."

But we interacted with the Red Cross. We interacted a lot with the CERT team. The National Guard -- god bless those guys. I don't even know where to begin to thank the National Guard. If it wasn't for them, with those high-water vehicles -- what we did was we put two EMTs with a jump-bag and a stair-chair, a rescue chair, on every one of those National Guard -- they call them "noose-and-halves." [Phonetic] They're five-ton trucks. As they were doing the evacuations, anybody who was medical -- we had medical personnel on the National Guard trucks.

EL: That's good. And they just went around the city, right?

TM: The way they describe it is -- they call it a "mission." So as the trucks came in, they would say, "Okay, Truck #8, you're going on Mission Whatever." They had to evacuate a specific area, trying to get people to high ground. Again, find out if people didn't have their medications -- whatever it might be -- but they had medically-trained personnel on every National Guard truck. Those were our guys from Hoboken Ambulance, and we worked fantastic with them. They got here, I guess, Thursday morning -- Wednesday night, Thursday morning. The actual operations may have started on Thursday, with the National Guard. But those guys were phenomenal -- guys and gals. They were *phenomenal*. I don't even know where to start to say thank-you to them.

We interacted a little with the Red Cross, for the shelters. But what happened with the shelters was, Wallace School was one of the bigger shelters. Their backup power failed, and then they got flooded so they had to evacuate from there. You mentioned St. Matthew's before -- St. Matthew's and St. Peter and Paul became like makeshift shelters. That was something that nobody -- they had to

move -- they set up a shelter and had to move the shelter. The Red Cross -- they were everywhere. They provided all kinds of comfort measures. Their main gig is like the sheltering, and they were phenomenal.

The city of Hoboken -- our interaction with the police department and the fire department is always -- we're side-by-side with them. We work hand-in-hand every day, but the camaraderie that happened during that storm -- everybody was watching out for everybody else: I've got your back, you've got mine. And the outpouring of support amongst the uniformed personnel -- the mayor, and the powers-that-be, that were running that emergency operation center -- the Director of Public Safety; the Office of Emergency Management -- they couldn't have done any better. They really couldn't have done any better.

You know, they were handed a really bad hand. If they were playing poker, they got handed a really crappy hand. They let it ride, and they ended up doing a really good job. There wasn't a whole lot that you could do. The power of water just overtakes everybody. One of the things I can say to the mayor -- the mayor kept calm amongst the city. Going back to Irene -- she pulled the trigger when she should have. You go back to Irene -- she saved a lot of lives. There was a lot of flooding, there

were a lot of people in basement and first-floor apartments that got flooded out. But her pulling the evacuation trigger then -- she saved a lot of lives, and she did the same thing in Sandy.

I thought for sure, when they started -- when the fire department started to do house-to-house searches, as the water receded -- we had actually one of our special-services trucks -- we carry 500 body bags. Myself and Mark had made the call: we put twenty-five body bags on every ambulance, because we had anticipated, "As they start going in, we're going to find people floating." We thought there were going to be a ton of dead people. And to be able to walk away from that, and have zero fatalities -- that's a miracle.

They talk about that plane landing as the Miracle on the Hudson? No. We were the Miracle *In* the Hudson. Because that was the Hudson River, and nobody died here. We were the miracle *in* the Hudson. And that came from planning. That came from early warning, early alerting, not pulling any punches. People have a tendency -- they want to candy-coat it. "Oh, well, you know -- there's going to be a storm, but we don't want to cause a panic." The mayor hit it head on, and she said, "We can't candy-coat this. Let's tell them the truth. Otherwise, we're going to have dead

people. And it's only going to make our job harder, because there are that many more people we're going to have to rescue."

Rescues were -- I can't even count them. The evacuations. Every evacuation was a rescue unto itself, because you weren't just knocking on a door and saying, "Hi. Come with me." It was, maybe you had to go up twelve flights of stairs. They had a call at Marine View Plaza, on the twenty-third floor, the second day into the storm -- a woman having a stroke. She had a stroke the second day, post-storm -- second or third. (Again, to me, it was a big [unclear].)

EL: Did Marine View have power at this point?

TM: No power. The generators -- they didn't even have running water, because it's such a large building, they need electric pumps to raise the water to the upper floors. I think they only had one on the first and second floors, because that was city -- that was something else. We didn't lose city water. A lot of people were concerned about that. We were getting reports into the emergency operations center, "Is it safe to drink the

water?" Nobody had the answer. It took twenty-four hours to get somebody to say, "Yeah, it's okay. You can drink the water."

So we never lost our city water. We didn't lose fire suppression. If you could find the fire hydrant, if it wasn't under water, they could have used it to suppress a fire. Those guys, the Hoboken Fire Department -- the first night of the storm, while it was going on -- every one of them should get a medal. They were out underneath live wires, they were walking around in water, with power lines down, that you didn't know if they were energized or not. They could have been killed at any given moment. Plus, they responded to, I can't tell you, countless numbers of reports of fires in a house: water got into the electrical power; they shorted out; they started fires. And, again, we were right there with them. If they were going, we were going.

The National Guard -- I don't know how to say thank-you to those guys. I keep repeating that, but they were phenomenal. You had the other services, too, that a lot of people forget about: The Office of Emergency Management. Those guys, they coordinated the whole thing. Logistically, they were able to get a lot of the resources that came in -- truck-mounted generators. Public Service

Electric & Gas -- the second day after the storm, the Observer Highway parking lot, behind Office Depot -- they had like eleven tractor-trailers, with everything they needed to rebuild the substations. They knew that the infrastructure was shot. Everything was under water. They had the entire substations on tractor-trailers. They just needed to be able to get the water to go down, so they could get in there and restore power.

We got power back at our building, at 707 Clinton Street, on Sunday afternoon. So when you think about it, we were only out of power six days. There were parts of Hoboken that didn't get re-energized for a week or more, maybe two weeks -- ten days, two weeks -- but we were very fortunate. We're on the same grid as the hospital, and PSE&G's primary goal was to get the hospital up and running. So to get the water out of the town, get the power back on, and we can open the hospital.

So that was huge, when they finally reopened the hospital. They didn't reopen the actual hospital upstairs, but they did open the ER, and by them reopening the emergency room, we were allowed to bring patients there again. What that allowed us to do was turn out ambulances over faster. When those ambulances were going up to Christ Hospital, there may have been five, six ambulances ahead of

them, so you had to wait your turn. But, again, the hospital back up and running -- again, public service -- that was huge.

EL: And the hospital was really damaged.

TM: Oh, the hospital sustained a lot of damage. The whole ER is being rebuilt, in sections.

EL: Because of their, like, MRIs, and a lot of their big machines, were all downstairs.

TM: The CATSCAN was actually in a trailer out on Clinton Street for months. The whole thing had to be rebuilt -- millions, and millions of dollars. Millions and millions of dollars. The Ambulance Corps -- we suffered, between the loss of two ambulances, our "comm struct," one of our special operations vehicles, the damage to our building, the ongoing cleanup -- we had to have a company come in. Before we could put our guys back in the building -- there was sewage and everything else -- we had to have the building -- SERVPRO came in and helped us out. They made our building a priority. Fire houses, and the ambulance corps, and the police station were a priority, so

we were able to get back in our building relatively soon after the storm. We got back in on Sunday. We had power and all that.

EL: So how much damage would you say -- ?

TM: All in all, we had almost \$750,000 worth of damage. Our insurance company was fabulous with us. We lost a ton of medical supplies -- soft supplies, and some hard supplies. What happened was, I had been on the phone with the insurance company the first thing Wednesday morning, and the agent that we deal with said, "Hi. I was waiting for your call yesterday." I said to him, "I was a little busy." [Unclear] Linda. She goes, "Well, what do you need?" I said, "Linda, a cash advance. We need to get medical supplies." She goes, "What do you need?" I said, "Everything." She said, "Give me fifteen minutes. I'll call you back." She literally called me back in fifteen minutes. She goes, "I've got a truckload of equipment coming to you. The insurance company is taking care of everything. We're going to get you back on your feet." Within four hours, a box truck pulled up to Stevens Institute (we were still up there), a box truck loaded with medical supplies, from a company out by the insurance company, which is in Short

Hills. How they got to Hoboken I still don't know, but they unloaded \$20,000 worth of medical supplies, and got us up and running.

EL: And by medical supplies you mean like bandages --

TM: Oxygen; bandages; oxygen masks; oxygen cannulas; backboards. We lost cervical collars. We lost headblocks. Anything that belongs -- and we were starting to run low, because we were doing so many calls -- you're using your equipment. Suction catheters. Anything you can imagine, that was disposable. You use it once, you throw it out. This is emergency low. They helped us out, unbelievable. The insurance company -- a new ambulance cost \$138,000; to replace one of the trucks was \$138,000. Our vehicles were insured for their value, which was about \$75,000. The company we were dealing with, the ambulance manufacturer, said, "We'll tell you what. We'll give you an ambulance for \$75,000; we'll worry about how you're going to pay the rest later on." So they literally built us an ambulance. The dealer that we work with -- DCI, down in Berlin, New Jersey -- Thursday morning flat-bedded a loaner ambulance to us. So we had the high-school ambulance, we

had the loaner ambulance, and we had one of our own. So we were back to full strength, ambulance wise, by Thursday -- plus, we had the five ambulances come in from the strike team. We actually ended up with more ambulances than we had to begin with.

But there are so many different people that we dealt with at FEMA. Unfortunately, we weren't eligible for any FEMA money. We were eligible for small-business loans, but we weren't eligible for any grant money, because the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance is a private company. It's not a residence, and it's not municipal. We're an independent company that's kind of contracted by the city of Hoboken to provide emergency medical services. So with FEMA, we were kind of like -- pardon the pun -- it was kind of a washout.

But between our insurance company and the residents -- the outpouring that we got from the residents of Hoboken -- this woman called. She contacted us within a week. Her name was Erica "Seedsman," [phonetic] and she arranged a fundraiser for us at Trinity, two weeks, three weeks after the storm -- "Just to get you guys back on your feet." We wound up making \$8,000; the money just started coming in.

EL: That's so cool.

TM: Unbelievable. When we finally got in our building on Sunday -- we know our neighbors and they know us. They would come out and say, "You guys are back." They were hugging each other, I was kissing people I never -- I knew them, "Hi, how are you, good morning. Hi, good evening." You're kissing people. The one guy and his wife turned around and said, "What do you guys need? What can we do for you?" And I looked up and said, "My guys haven't had a hot meal in three days. Anything you can do." The woman says, "I know exactly what we're going to do. I'll be back in a half hour." Okay. His name is Brian, and his wife is Wendy. Brian turned to me and he goes, "I've got something for you. I'll be back." He comes down fifteen minutes later with two Mr. Coffee pots of coffee. We hadn't had hot -- I would have killed somebody for a cup of Dunkin Donuts coffee. I would have cut somebody's throat for a cup of Dunkin Donuts coffee.

EL: But you couldn't get milk anywhere. That was the problem. I could make coffee, but --

TM: Two pots of coffee, and he had Cremora, the powdered thing. It was better than nothing. Then his wife, she came down a few minutes later with two trays. She made five pounds of pasta, heated up some Ragu sauce and dumped it on top -- it was the best dish of macaroni you ever had. It was like, "Oh, my god, real food! I'm not eating an MRE."

And now I know why they give the military MREs.

EL: Why?

TM: So they don't have to go to the bathroom when they're out in the field. You eat one of them, it binds you up for three days.

EL: Are you serious?

TM: Oh, my god.

EL: I've been wanting to try one.

TM: No, you don't. [Laughter] No, you don't. The food's not bad; it sustains life. You eat what you've

got. But now I know why they give them to the military. You don't go to the bathroom for three days. It was horrible. It was horrible.

EL: So what do think, like going forward in the future? Do you think it's going to change any of your routines?

TM: Oh, my god, yes. Oh, the contingency plans that have already been -- the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance Corps has an emergency operations plan internal. We have completely revamped it. We learned a lot. We learned that you can't depend on your radios. We learned about how important it is -- electricity. Now we're getting a backup -- the city of Hoboken is providing us with a naturally gas-powered generator on our building, that even if the city power goes out, it's an automatic; it kicks in, and our entire building will be powered. That's a godsend. We went out and bought a portable kitchen, a portable toilet, and a portable shower unit. It cost us \$1,000, all included, but if this were ever to happen again -- when we were up at Stevens -- literally, it's a kitchen in a bag. You drop the bag, you open it up, and you stand it -- it's a kitchen, with propane-powered stoves. It's a tent.

There's another bag that's got a ring in the top. You open the bag, you grab the ring, you pull it -- it's a seven-foot-tall tent that pops out, and it's a real bathroom. We have another one that looks exactly the same; when you pull it out, it's a shower room. There's a heater that goes along with it. You can take a hot shower. Just members, for the members. We realized that our medical supplies -- now everything is raised. We couldn't go up six feet, but we've gone up four. We've built shelving; anything that can perish in water is four feet or higher. And we tried to store most of the stuff way up high in the cabinet. It's a pain in the rear-end to get it down. But you know what? We're not taking a chance. With our vehicles, we learned that we've got to get out of the building sooner.

EL: And take the vehicles to higher ground.

TM: Take the vehicles to higher ground much sooner next time. If there were so much as a hurricane -- once this area, now, was to go under a hurricane watch, as opposed to a hurricane warning, we would start making provisions to move. We would never be caught in that situation again. There are all kinds of contingency plans. One of the things we're going to discuss with the city and

the hospital is, going forward, having the hospital completely shut down -- Hoboken University -- having them completely shut down killed us. So what we're going to do is -- Stevens told us, "You can have this gym anytime you need it." We're actually in the speaking phase now. They have to evacuate the hospital. We understand that. But instead of shutting the emergency room down, maybe there's a way we can set an emergency room up in Stevens, a temporary emergency room. This way, we can bring patients there, and they can at least get emergent care, and we can always transfer them to hospitals later. So that's something we're developing.

We learned, as I said before, about the oxygen -- so many people on oxygen, Sick/Not-Sick; they weren't really sick, they just didn't have their oxygen. And they need it. So, regular shelters wouldn't accept them. A regular shelter won't take them with an oxygen generator. I mentioned it to the mayor, and she loved the idea: we have to find a place in Hoboken where there's power, where we can set up an oxygen shelter, a medical shelter. Maybe it's for diabetics --

EL: I think St. Matthew's took some. But also, what about maybe setting up a database -- finding out who the people are in town, who are using oxygen --

TM: CERT's doing that right now.

EL: -- so this way you call ahead of time, and you make sure you have backup. You know that person's on oxygen, so they've got to have some kind of alternate power.

TM: A lot of them have batteries. All those units have battery backups; they're only good for eight hours. The unit comes with an eight-hour battery backup, but we were out of power for up to two weeks. Some people were out for two weeks.

But the CERT team, through Lou Casciano and through the mayor -- I don't want to talk out of school, but I think the name they're using is Hobokenready.org, or Hobokenready.com, or something to that effect. They're compiling a database that we'll all have access to -- the fire department, police department, EMS, CERT, OEM. Everybody can go into that database, and if I want to know how many people in Hoboken are on oxygen, I'll get a list.

Now what I can do, at that point, is I can dedicate one or two of my ambulances, and say, "Okay. You've got this twenty, you've got this twenty. Make sure these people are okay." Once they've finished that, we take two different ambulances. "You guys have this twenty, you guys have this twenty. You two who were just doing it -- you come back, and you recoup." We learned that operational periods became very important. Myself and Mark Harris, the captain, learned that you can't do it all. At one point, you've got to know when to say when. You start to become hazy. You're not thinking completely right.

Another thing that I had on my mind through the whole thing was, my wife is a diabetic, an insulin-dependent diabetic on an insulin pump. So I was calling here. I have T-Mobile, and I never lost cell service. It was amazing. I never lost my cell service.

EL: Someone else said that to me.

TM: I kept charging my phone in the Ambulance Corps chief's car, and I said to her -- she kept going down to our car in the parking lot, keeping her phone charged, keeping her phone charged from the car. I called her every half hour, every hour. My daughter, at the time,

was fifteen, and I said to my wife, Erin, "Put Brittany on the phone." So she got on the phone, and I said, "Listen, Brit, you've got to know how to do something in case Mommy's sugar goes low." She said, "I've got to give her orange juice." I said, "Okay. Initially. But if she becomes unconscious, it's going to take the ambulance a long time to get there. I need you to take the phone, and go into the bedroom. In the night table you'll see two red boxes." She said, "Yeah, I'm looking at it." I said, "Okay. Open it up." She said, "Well, Daddy, there's a needle in here." I said, "Yes. That's called the glucagon injection. I'm going to tell you exactly how to do this. Write this down." I could hear her. She was very serious about it. I said, "This is how you give glucagon. If Mommy's sugar goes low, and you can't get the orange juice in her, you have to inject her with that, and that will wake her up. Then you can get the orange juice into her." And she's going, "I don't know if I could stick Mommy with a needle." And I was like, "Brittany, you've got to call me, and you have to do this. You're sure you're going to be able to do this, right?" Thank god -- thank the blessed lord -- my wife's sugar never bottomed out.

So one of the other things we learned, again, going forward, is we have to make provisions for our

members to make sure that their families are taken care of. A lot of these guys didn't -- I didn't see my wife for seven days. A lot of these guys -- the only communication they had with their families was, "I'm still in Hoboken. I can't get out." A couple of them got evacuated. In Weehawken and West New York, some of the people up there on the waterfront -- they actually got told, "You've got to get out of your house." So these guys had family who had been evacuated, and they didn't even know if their family was okay. So that was something else we put into motion; that we have to find a reasonable way for our members to be able to say that, "My family is okay." It makes you think in a much clearer way. If you know everything is okay at home, you're able to perform your job. So that was something we were going forward -- and what else?

Having been a mutual aid, I think, is a huge, huge --

EL: And by that you mean like from surrounding communities.

TM: Outside the surrounding -- in other words, having mutual aid available from outside the affected area. They called this Super Storm -- Hurricane,

Super Storm -- you couldn't even get mutual aid from the State of New Jersey; you need to have these contingency -- and the state handled -- I have to say, I think the State Department of Health handled it pretty well. They had resources come in from Pennsylvania, Maryland, people in Indiana and West Virginia. Those were four of the states, and they had already gotten these guys mobilized. But I think that they need to get them to the affected areas a little faster next time, so that's something that's being discussed. That's above us. That's a state thing.

But that was a huge concern. Even the National Guard -- the guys were fabulous, but they don't deploy for seventy-two hours. It takes them a couple days to get there. The only thing we learned is we need to be (we meaning the city of Hoboken, the Hoboken Volunteer Ambulance Corps and everybody else), we need to be more self-sufficient. It wouldn't be a bad idea for the city of Hoboken to buy one or two high-water vehicles, like those "noose-and-a-half" trucks, those five-ton trucks.

EL: They must cost a fortune.

TM: You can get them from Army surplus for like \$40 grand.

EL: Oh. That's not bad.

TM: You buy two of them -- it's an \$80.000-investment, but you can start moving people as soon as the storm is over and it's safe to get out. You can start moving people. Now when the National Guard gets there, with seven, eight trucks -- now you have ten. If they come with eight, now you've got ten. That's two more missions you can accomplish at a given time.

So we're still learning. We're still learning.

EL: But that's good. Actually, in a way, it's good that Irene happened a year before, because in a way it was sort of a practice.

TM: Almost. The only thing I really find great is that all of the entities -- no one is saying, "Oh, it went perfect. We couldn't have done better." Everybody recognized that there were flaws, a deficit, and nobody's playing the game where, "Oh, everything went great." Everybody is saying, "Okay, listen. This is our problem, this is how we want to try and fix that, so it doesn't

happen again, and this is what we really need." It takes a good leader to come out and say, "We couldn't do this alone, and there was a deficit here. There was a problem. We need to be self-sufficient for the first seventy-two hours. We need this." We couldn't do that, and it killed me. When you go through EMT training -- and I was a paid fireman for the city of Hoboken. That was my paid job. I was a firefighter for twenty-five years. Twenty-six years. The last ten I was captain. But every day, when you go to the fire house -- and every day, when I go on duty on the ambulance -- you're trained from day one: somebody calls for help, you go. There's an emergency. Once you get there, the emergency is over. Well, what we learned was sometimes you can't get to the emergency, in a situation like this. And you could see the frustration, not only on the EMT's faces, but the firefighters, and the cops -- that they couldn't get to these people. Certain people you just couldn't get to, and you're not programmed that way. You're programmed from day one, the first day you walk into the class -- you're programmed, "You're here, when you get there the emergency is over. You're going to make everything better." And to be standing here and looking, and having people wave to you, "Come help us," and not being able to go -- that is one of the most frustrating

things I have ever encountered. It hurts. There were a lot of tears. There really were.

Guys. There's always animosity. You've always got one guy that don't like somebody else. One of the things -- we had two members of the ambulance corps who haven't spoken to each other -- just personality conflicts. They just don't like each other, and they hadn't spoken -- they were really close friends years ago, and they probably haven't spoken in ten years. They ended up in the casualty collection point, and one was working one area and one was working other area. And I even said to Mark, "You know what? Maybe we should move him further down." They mix like oil and vinegar. And he said, "Oh, they'll be all right." Like a half hour later, [unclear] walked right up to him, and you could see them talking. So I got up. I had to go see. I'm a nosy bastard. I had to go see what was going on. And I said to them, "What are you doing?" Because I'm saying, "Oh my god, I hope one don't hit the other one." "What are you doing?" And they're crying. They embraced each other. Two men. Two grown men embraced each other and started crying. I started -- I said, "What are you doing? Now you've got me going? Now you've got me going. What are you doing?" And he says, "I walked up to him and I asked him, 'Why don't we talk to each other?' And he said the

same thing I said: 'I don't remember.'" They shook hands, and now they're the best of friends again.

So, in tragedy, it brings out the best in people.

EL: Oh, yes. Well, I think that happened all over Hoboken.

TM: People on Hudson Street allowing -- they had city power. They were stretching extension cords, and coffee pots, and letting people charge your cell phone. If you had a charged cell phone, you were golden. It was the only means of communication.

But it brought the best out and the best, it really did. The citizens of Hoboken, they should all be very proud of themselves. They really went above and beyond. It wasn't all me, me, me, me, me. Everybody took care of somebody else. That's what it's all about. And Hoboken has always been known to be a tight-knit community, and that just fortified it.

EL: Right. I agree totally.

Okay. Anything else you want to add, before we wrap up? That was great, Tom. Thank you so much.

TM: No, thank you.

EL: All right. We'll stop.

TM: I really appreciate it.