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# THE PUBLIC SERVICE ROLE OF THE LOCAL PENSACOLA MASS MEDIA DURING HURRICANE IVAN

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THE PUBLIC SERVICE ROLE OF THE LOCAL PENSACOLA  
MASS MEDIA DURING HURRICANE IVAN

By

Chad D. Morehead

A THESIS

Presented to the faculty of  
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Under the Supervision of Professor Larry J. Walklin

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THE PUBLIC SERVICE ROLE OF THE LOCAL PENSACOLA  
MASS MEDIA DURING HURRICANE IVAN

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University of Nebraska, 2011

Advisor: Larry J. Walklin

During disasters, residents from impacted areas need information to help them respond to and cope with the destruction. The local media play an important role in providing this disaster related information to their community. This is especially true during major disasters which knock out electrical power and information distribution channels and make it difficult for residents to receive mediated information. While the public's informational needs vary from disaster to disaster, some disasters such as hurricanes provide the media opportunities to provide information that can help the public prepare for the disaster, respond to the disaster, and recover from the disaster. Hurricane Ivan, which made its first U.S. landfall on September 16, 2004, provided such opportunities to the Pensacola media organizations. For a case study of this event, the Escambia County Public Information Officer and 17 Pensacola media professionals representing 13 local media organizations that participated in Hurricane Ivan coverage were interviewed about their experiences during the disaster. These interviews included personnel from print, television, and radio organizations. While not every Pensacola media organization got involved in this hurricane coverage, these interviews show that those that did were committed to providing an important public service to Pensacola's

residents by giving them the information they needed during each of the three stages of preparation, response, and recovery. None of these organizations were able to single-handedly meet all of the public's informational needs, but they each contributed in important ways. It was the combined efforts of the local media—sometimes through formal arrangements with each other—that provided the necessary information to Pensacola residents throughout the disaster.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

Reports of disasters are frequently some of the top stories in the news. Wildfires, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, oil spills, hurricanes, and similar disasters seem to take their turns impacting local communities around the world—often with little or no warning. The local media in these communities are able to cover these stories from a close vantage point; however, a major disaster can be more than just a news story to them. Disasters provide local media organizations opportunities to provide important informational services to their communities while at the same time challenging them with difficult conditions. On September 16, 2004 the local Pensacola, Florida media were confronted with the landfall of Hurricane Ivan—a major hurricane that challenged the local media’s abilities to communicate to their communities while at the same time providing an environment in which they could serve unique informational needs of those communities. Residents were in need of meteorological information such as where the hurricane would go and how intense it would be, official information such as locations and times of evacuations and curfews, and humanitarian information such as who needed help and where residents could go to receive help. The Pensacola media’s experiences with this disaster provide an opportunity to better understand the public service that local media organizations—whether or not they are news outlets— can provide to their communities during disaster situations.

## Chapter 2 Overview of Hurricane Ivan

The 2004 hurricane season had sixteen named Atlantic storms—nine of which became hurricanes (National Weather Center, nd). Four of these storms made landfall in Florida in about a six week span. Hurricane Charley was the first of these storms to impact Florida when it made landfall near Port Charlotte as a category four storm on August 13 and then moved northeast across the Florida peninsula (Pasch, Brown, Daniel, and Blake, 2004). Then, on September 4 Hurricane Frances made landfall on Florida's east coast near Port St. Lucie as a category two storm before crossing the peninsula on a northwest track (Beven, 2004). Next, Hurricane Ivan made landfall near the Florida/Alabama state line as a category three storm on September 16 (National Hurricane Center, nd, Hurricane Tracking Chart). Then finally, Hurricane Jeanne made landfall as a category three storm on September 25 just south of where Hurricane Frances came ashore. Jeanne then proceeded to move northwest across the state before heading north up Florida's west coast and into Georgia (Lawrence & Cobb, 2004). As these four storms crisscrossed the state, their paths of destruction left little of Florida untouched.

Most of the state was impacted either directly or indirectly by these storms. Areas that were not hit directly were helping out those who had. For example, in the weeks before Hurricane Ivan made landfall, Pensacola residents, churches, organizations, and companies donated money and resources to help the communities impacted by Hurricanes Charley and Frances (Moon, 2004). Thousands of evacuees from Frances had also sought refuge in the Pensacola area as they fled from that storm (Ingram, 2004).

However, just days later, residents from Pensacola and the surrounding area were themselves looking to evacuate from Hurricane Ivan.

Nearly two weeks before it made its U.S. landfall, Ivan had become a tropical storm off Africa's west coast on September 3. Within forty-eight hours of becoming a named storm, Ivan strengthened to hurricane status and then continued to strengthen until it was a category three storm only eighteen hours later (Stewart, 2004). This set a record for the furthest south that a major hurricane had developed (Stewart, 2004). Ivan continued to intensify and reached category five hurricane status on September 9 (Stewart, 2004). It then spent the next four days fluctuating in strength between a category four and a category five storm as it swiped Jamaica, Grand Cayman, and Cuba with hurricane force winds (Stewart, 2004). Throughout this period, Ivan attained a category five status three different times and maintained that strength for a total of thirty hours (Stewart, 2004). In the Gulf of Mexico, Ivan lost some of its intensity as it continued north and made its first official U.S. landfall as a category three storm near Gulf Shores, Alabama September, 16 at 1:50 am CDT (Stewart, 2004).

While Ivan's winds at landfall were less intense than when it was a category five storm in the Atlantic, as a category three storm it was still a major hurricane that was massive in size with the eye alone measuring nearly fifty miles across (Stewart, 2004). Ivan's destruction resulted from its strong winds, a high storm surge, and many tornadoes. Its strongest winds were officially measured on land gusting at well over one hundred mph (Stewart, 2004). Accompanying these high winds, Ivan's prior category five wind speeds had formed a wall of water in front of it that created a peak storm surge

of fifteen-feet at landfall (Stewart, 2004). This surge was measured as far south as Tampa Bay, but it most impacted the Florida panhandle where a ten to fifteen foot wall of water slammed into about a hundred miles of coast from Destin, Florida to Mobile Bay in Alabama (Stewart, 2004). Pensacola, Florida is located approximately in the middle of this span. Ivan also produced 117 tornadoes as it came ashore and passed through several eastern states (Stewart, 2004). Most of these tornadoes were formed in Virginia, Georgia, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Maryland, North Carolina, and West Virginia after Ivan lost hurricane strength, but at least 26 of them accompanied the high winds in Florida and Alabama as Ivan made landfall (Stewart, 2004).

Pensacola, Florida, located about thirty miles to the east of Gulf Shores, Alabama, was hit by the powerful northeastern edge of Hurricane Ivan as it made its first U.S landfall (Medlin, Ball, & Beeler, 2005). It was not only impacted by some of the highest storm surge, but the Pensacola Naval Air Station, which is on the southwestern edge of the city, officially recorded the U. S. landfall's strongest winds at over 100 mph (Stewart, 2004). Additionally, some of Ivan's heaviest rainfall totals were measured at the studios of Pensacola television station WEAR-TV (3) where the rainfall was measured at nearly sixteen inches (Stewart, 2004).

While Pensacola was impacted by the full strength of the storm, communities on the west side of the eye fared better. The Mobile-Pensacola National Weather Service Weather Forecast Office reported that if Ivan would have made landfall to the west of Mobile Bay, downtown Mobile would have probably seen a storm surge of 16 to 18 feet (Medlin, Ball, & Beeler, 2005). However, because Ivan came ashore to the east of

Mobile, the storm surge around Mobile was less than five feet high while the storm surge that hit Pensacola varied from about 10 to 13 feet high while (National Weather Service Weather Forecast Office, 2004). Likewise, the WKRQ-TV (5) studios in downtown Mobile only recorded a peak wind gust of 74 mph compared with the more than 100 mph winds recorded in Pensacola (Medlin, Ball, & Beeler, 2005, Table 2), and the highest rainfall total recorded in Mobile was about half of the highest rainfall total in Pensacola (Medlin, Ball, & Beeler, 2005, Table 4).

The storm's destruction around the Pensacola area was not limited to the beach communities. It extended throughout the entire county. For example, during the storm officials fielded more than nine hundred emergency calls from throughout Escambia County (Haller, 2004), two key bridges that connect Pensacola to other nearby Florida communities were destroyed (Moon, 2004), and after the storm, more than 55% of Escambia County households applied for FEMA housing assistance (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2005). State officials responded to the disaster by sending around two thousand Florida National Guard troops to the community (Moon, 2004). The extent of the devastation in Pensacola also quickly garnered national attention and the community was toured by federal officials such as Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge who, after his survey of the area, called the destruction "a monstrous disaster" (Page, 2004).

For residents whose homes were still livable, most had no electrical power. Ivan knocked out power to 90% of Gulf Power customers including 137,963 homes in Escambia County, Florida (Gulf Power, 2004, September, 16). One week later

approximately 63,000 customers were still without power (Gulf Power, 2004, September, 24). By the end of the next week, most of the restorable power was restored. After this time, the only areas that still did not have power were those communities where major reconstruction was necessary (Gulf Power, 2004, September, 29).<sup>1</sup>

While Pensacola residents were dealing with the changes that Hurricane Ivan brought to their lives, the local mass media were also dealing with the hurricane conditions as they attempted to keep up with the informational needs of their public in the midst of the destruction.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for a description of the day-by-day restoration of power in Escambia County.

## Chapter 3 Literature Review of the Media and Disasters

While each disaster is unique, the literature on mass media disaster communications can provide insight into how Hurricane Ivan may have impacted the local Pensacola media. The literature covers a variety of disaster situations, but these situations have similarities that may provide media organizations with insights into how to better report disasters they encounter.

### *The Impact of Disasters on Media Organizations*

The literature indicates that the media may go through several changes in the way it operates during disaster communication situations. Researchers have found that when faced with disaster situations, media organizations respond by becoming more dynamic and flexible in their operations. Sood et al. (1987) speaks of journalists that charter jets to fly thousands of miles and that spend hundreds of dollars on a phone call in the attempt to tell the stories under the difficult conditions caused by natural disasters (pp. 31-32). Sellnow et al. (2002) reports of radio stations forgoing their regular programming and becoming “community bulletin boards” with the exchange of personal information among members of the public during a flood (p. 289). Additionally, Guion et al. (2007) found in a study of communication during Hurricane Katrina that some in the media went beyond their usual roles of objective observers. They saw that “a new role for media emerged during Katrina—that of first responders” (p.25).

Another change in the media during disasters that has been noted in the literature is an alteration of the media’s traditional role as a gatekeeper. Researchers have found that during natural disasters there is an information void that causes an “open gate”

within the media (Hornig et al., 1991, p. 34; Sood et al., 1987, pp32, 37). This lack of information causes a situation where “the news flow resembles an *inverted* (italics in the original) funnel” (Sood et al., 1987, p. 32). In other words, there is less information coming in to the media than the media needs so all the information that comes in to the media organizations goes back out to the public with little or no filtering (Sood et al., 1987, p. 32). As the media attempts to keep their publics informed in the midst of this information void, researchers have noted that many of the media would prefer the aid of someone who can serve as a centralized clearing house for the information that the public needs (Sood et al., 1987, p. 35).

Researchers have suggested that this situation gives the loudest voices an easy opportunity to get their information out because those are the voices that are prepared to take advantage of the information void (Hornig et al., 1991, p. 35). Sellnow et al. (2002) reports of a Fargo radio station that “invited city officials and representatives from support agencies to broadcast their messages at will” (p. 282). Hornig et al. (1991) found that government sources were much more likely to be used in disaster stories than were scientific sources even though meteorologists (who are often readily available and are useful during many kinds of disasters) were included as scientific sources (p. 34-35, 37-38). This source bias can lead to a situation where the public primarily receives messages emphasizing governmental, rather than private, information and solutions (Hornig et al., 1991, p. 42). The Hornig et al. (1991) study, which was a content analysis of both hurricane and earthquake coverage, found that 55% of all sources quoted were government sources. For comparison, the next most quoted category, research sources,



was a distant second only being quoted 13% of the time (Hornig et al., 1991, p. 38).

When the quotes Hornig et al. (1991) studied identified solutions to the disaster, more than 56% of them identified government solutions (Hornig et al., 1991, p. 42).

### *The Media's Response to Disasters*

While these studies seem to indicate that in some cases the media may lose control of their own messages as they are impacted by disasters, other research has shown that the media are sometimes proactive in attempting to take control of their disaster reporting. In a study of broadcast station civil disturbance and disaster policies, Kueneman and Wright (1975) found that most broadcast stations are more rigorous in their fact checking during the coverage of disasters than during their coverage of normal stories (p. 673). The authors found that the extra care taken with the stories may be due to the fact that many of these stations also perceived that their publics were prone to be easily excited and that consequently they might over react to these stories (Kueneman and Wright, 1975, p. 673).

Whether or not the public does overreact during disasters, the need to provide the public with accurate information is very important as illustrated by Sellnow et al. (2002). In their study of the 1997 Red River flood, they noted that the uncertainty that forecasters had in their changing predictions of the flood crest levels was not passed on to the public; therefore residents never prepared for the possibility that the flood might crest at higher levels than what was being forecast (Sellnow et al., 2002, p. 278). Had the media been more careful in passing on the uncertainty of the predictions, the public may have been able to better prepare for the dangers that actually existed.

Another study of media coverage during a disaster found that after Hurricane Katrina the print media carried messages that were critiquing of government solutions instead of simply passing the government messages on. In this study, Littlefield & Quenette (2007) found that both a local New Orleans newspaper (*Times-Picayune*) and a national newspaper (*New York Times*) took on dual roles of both “objective informer” and “privileged reporter evaluating the effectiveness of authorities” (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007, p. 43). They found that these papers went through a progression of how they covered responding officials. “First, the media identified authority figures with legitimate responsibility to manage the crisis . . . Once the media fulfilled their functional role in clarifying the chaos surrounding the situation, they began to include information about the performance of those with legitimate authority. . . However, as the events unfolded and the crisis leadership of the legitimate authorities proved to be highly inadequate in response to the destruction and loss of life, the media served as a vehicle for identifying such problems” (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007, p. 42).

#### *Differences between the Media*

An area in which media organizations can differ greatly is in the preparations that they have made for disasters. In a 1975 study of broadcast stations, Kueneman & Wright (1975) found that broadcast station preparedness for disasters and civil disturbances varied from station to station, but they were able to identify several factors that were predictors of station preparedness. They found that stations were more likely to have disaster plans if: 1. they were more powerful, 2. they were located in mid to large sized markets, 3. they had experienced disasters previously, 4. they had a network affiliation,

and 5. they existed in a “disaster subculture” (Kueneman & Wright, 1975, p. 675-676). Because both broadcast station technologies and ownership rules have changed since 1975, it may be assumed that some of the Kueneman & Wright (1975) findings may not apply to stations today. However, this study can provide a perspective to help understand the historical development of an individual broadcast station’s preparedness policies. Additionally, several of these factors listed by Kueneman & Wright (1975) are not necessarily tied to technological or ownership issues and may still have validity as predictors today.

This study also seems to indicate that stations with more disaster experience will be better prepared to handle disasters because it found that the majority of stations that had experienced natural disasters altered their disaster plans after the experience—especially when they also existed in that “disaster subculture” (Kueneman & Wright, 1975, pp. 677). This would seem to indicate that the number of times a media organization has gone through a disaster may correspond with the quality of their planning. A station that has gone through many disasters will have disaster plans that have been refined many times. The disaster subculture also seems to foster an environment where the media will tend to have more “specific” plans for reacting to disasters (Kueneman & Wright, 1975, p. 676).

In addition to differences in planning, other studies in the literature indicate that each type of media may have unique qualities that impact how it reacts during disasters. For example, a study of a blizzard in Denver that compared a television station’s coverage with a newspaper’s coverage found that the two media differed in both the

content and style of their coverage. While they both heavily covered the blizzard, their coverage focused on different aspects of the story (Wilkins, 1985, pp. 55-56, 58). The newspaper had more coverage of preparation for the disaster, but television took the lead in covering long-term recovery (Wilkins, 1985, p. 58). Additionally, this study noted that the two media also differed in the types of news stories they carried, television had a higher percentage of hard news stories while the newspaper had a higher percentage of “feature and human interest stories” (Wilkins, 1985, pp. 58-59).

In their study of public relations practitioners’ experiences during hurricane Katrina, Lundy & Broussard (2007) noted the unique role that radio can play during a disaster. They said that the public relations practitioners they surveyed found radio to be “the most effective way to reach their publics” (Lundy & Broussard, 2007, p. 222). These practitioners found that people who did not have access to electricity or many of the other normal communication methods could still be reached through radio (Lundy & Broussard, 2007, p. 222).

The quality of immediacy that the broadcast media have allows them the unique opportunity to give moment-by-moment updates about changing conditions during natural disasters such as hurricanes. In their content analysis of local television station wall-to-wall coverage during four different hurricanes, Daniels & Loggins (2007) found that this type of coverage was somewhat narrow in scope. It placed a higher emphasis on the weather personnel at the stations than on the news personnel; and the vast majority of stories (70% of the stories at three of the four stations studied) contained weather information while very little information was given out about preparations and safety

(Daniels & Loggins, 2007, pp. 58, 59). This focus on weather to the exclusion of other information may be because wall-to-wall coverage is happening during the disaster when little preparation and safety information could be implemented.

In addition to there being differences in coverage between different types of media the literature also indicates that there are differences between how local and national media outlets handle disasters. For example, the Littlefield & Quenette (2007) study drew a distinction between the focuses in the Hurricane Katrina coverage of a national media outlet (the *New York Times*) and a local New Orleans media outlet (the *Times-Picayune*). The authors found that while both newspapers carried negative critiques of officials, the *New York Times* focused their critiques on officials in the federal government while the *Times-Picayune* focused more on the perspective of the local officials (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007 p. 43).

Not only do the local media have a different focus than the national media do, they may also be more useful in getting out information to local communities. In the Lundy & Broussard (2007) study, the public relations practitioners said they found that in the media frenzies that followed the storms, the local media were the easiest to work with because the public relations practitioners already had working relationships with the media personnel. The public relations practitioners also said that the local media personnel helped them dispel rumors (Lundy & Broussard, 2007 p. 221).

#### *The Public's Use of the Media*

The literature indicates that the public looks to the mass media for information throughout all the various stages of disasters. A study of Galveston residents after

Hurricane Alicia hit the city in 1983 found that that the media played an instrumental role in alerting the public to the danger of the hurricane as it approached the community. The study showed that media outlets—particularly broadcast media outlets— were instrumental in warning residents about the approaching storm. The majority of respondents said that they first heard about the approaching storm from either television or radio with almost 60% saying that they first heard about the storm from television while an additional 17% said that they first heard about the storm from radio (Ledingham & Masel-Walters, 1985, p. 52-53).

A study of Hurricane Danny found that the public will also rely on available media while the hurricane is making landfall. Hurricane Danny, a Category 1 hurricane which impacted the Gulf Coast along the Florida/Alabama state line in 1997, stalled for three days just off land causing major flooding, but never knocking out the electrical power in Pensacola, Florida (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 1998, pp. 341- 343). Because they didn't lose power, Pensacola residents had full access to their normal media sources. Piotrowski & Armstrong found that the local media played a very important role in providing information to the residents as 89% cited use of local television sources and 86% cited use of local radio sources.

Because respondents still had access to all their usual electronic media, cable television also served as a major source of media with 72% of respondents using the Weather Channel and 46% using other cable television stations for information (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 1998, p. 344). These numbers seem to indicate that many respondents did not rely on just a single information source, but that since they had all of

their usual media sources available they accessed several different sources during the hurricane.

This study also seemed to indicate a difference in how residents used the different media types. The local television channels and the Weather Channel were both used more on an “hourly” or “every few hours” basis while the local radio stations were used more on a “daily” or “every few hours” basis (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 1998, p. 344). This may indicate that while respondents used both radio and television on a daily basis they turned to television for the more frequent moment-by-moment coverage and then checked in with local radio stations for additional information.

Other research indicates the public also relies on the media for pertinent information after a disaster. In a study that researched the audience response to a health and safety radio campaign in New Orleans after Katrina (Beaudoin, *Media effects* pp. 699-700; Beaudoin, *Mass media use* p. 643-644), researchers found that the target audience heavily used the media for health and safety information post-Katrina. The study found that at one point nearly 100% of the respondents were using the news for this type of information (Beaudoin, *Media effects* p. 702).

#### *Media Impact on the Public*

As with any other type of media message, the mere fact that the public consumes the media’s disaster communications is not proof that these messages are effective; therefore it is also important to look at the actual impact that the media’s emergency communication has on the public. Studies looking at the impact of disaster communication have found varying results. The Hurricane Alicia study found that while

the majority of the public first found out about the storm through the media, messages designed to influence how they prepared for the storm were less than effective. The study found that while a majority of respondents indicated that they thought that the news media was generally reliable in both their normal reporting and in their hurricane reporting, only 21% of them actually took their cues on preparing for the storm from the media, the majority instead relied on their own prior experiences with hurricanes and their discussions with others in their storm preparations (Ledingham & Masel-Walters, 1985, pp. 54-55). When it came to deciding whether or not to evacuate, only 32% of respondents made that decisions based on “news reports” while nearly half of them used their experiences or other people as the deciding factor (Ledingham & Masel-Walters, 1985, p. 55).

According to Ledingham & Masel-Walters (1985), a prior experience that probably played an important part in most of the residents not evacuating was an evacuation that was ordered three years earlier for a hurricane that ended up not hitting Galveston (pp. 52, 55). Likewise, the Hurricane Alicia experience seemed to build on the personal experience of residents as after the storm the majority of respondents indicated that they would evacuate the next time a hurricane similar to Alicia was predicted to hit Galveston (Ledingham & Masel-Walters, 1985, p. 55). Interestingly then, future media messages calling for evacuations may appear to be very effective, when in fact it is the prior experience of Hurricane Alicia that is the driving force behind the evacuations.

While the evacuation messages prior to Hurricane Alicia did not seem to be very effective, other research has documented media messages that did have an impact on



influencing the public's preparation for a disaster, but that the public responds differently to different media. A study of a 1988 saltwater incursion into the Mississippi river found that while both the local newspaper and television coverage of a disaster elicited response from the public, television had a more immediate effect on the public's behavior (Spencer et al., 1992, pp. 302, 312, 314). Additionally, this study found that visual material accompanying the coverage had more of an impact on the public when it was seen on television than when it was seen in the newspaper (Spencer et al., 1992, p. 317).

Another study that showed a positive link between a media message and the public's response was the study of the post Katrina health and safety radio campaign in New Orleans where researchers found that 83% of respondents remembered the radio campaign (Beaudoin, *Media effects* p. 702). While this high recall rate only indicates that it was a successful campaign in its penetration, the authors also found that the exposure to these media messages was found to have influenced the respondents' behavior regarding safety (Beaudoin, *Media effects* p. 704) and helping others (Beaudoin, *Mass media use* pp. 656-657).

### *The Disaster Stages*

Something that the media must do in order to increase the effectiveness of their messages during disasters is to be aware of their changing information roles as a disaster progresses. In a case study of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Emergency Communication System response to Hurricane Katrina the authors found that the CDC's plans for the response after the disaster were not adequate. They found that its customary single-stage approach for communications after the disaster was not effective during a

complex disaster such as Hurricane Katrina because people needed different information at different times during the disaster. Residents initially needed health information to help them in the aftermath of a hurricane, they then needed different health information to help them deal with a flood, and then they needed health information that could help them deal with being long-term evacuees (Vanderford, et al., 2007, pp. 17-18) The authors suggested that a five-stage approach would have allowed the CDC to be more effective in giving the public what it needed when it needed it (Vanderford, et al., 2007, pp. 20-21).

Several other studies have divided disasters into a variety of stages to aid in the understanding of them. Guion et al. (2007) studied the function of the media's emergency communications throughout the different stages of Hurricane Katrina using a model that looks at disasters in four stages ranging from the early planning stages to the post-disaster recovery (pp.20, 21). The authors state that "communication is a key thread" during each of these four stages (Guion et al., 2007, pp.20, 25). However, they indicate that the purpose of that communication will change through the different stages. In their first stage that they label "mitigation" they say that the media helps set the tone by aiding "in the formation of public attitudes" that can impact how government prepares (Guion et al., 2007, p.20, 21). In their second stage that they label "preparedness" the authors say that the media play a role in assisting authorities in educating the public about what it can do to prepare (Guion et al., 2007, p. 21). In their third stage which they label "response" they say that the role of the media is to assist the many different governmental and private organizations that respond to disasters with getting out information that aids in the

coordination of their efforts (Guion et al., 2007, p. 21). Finally in the last stage which they label “recovery” they say that the media can alert the public to aid that is available to them and that they can also help the public understand why it is necessary (Guion et al., 2007, pp. 21. 22).

The Wilkins (1985) study comparing newspaper and television’s coverage of a 1982 blizzard in Denver, Colorado used a similar framework , but with five (rather than four) distinct phases—“pre-disaster hazard mitigation and preparedness,” “predisaster hazard prediction and warning,” “disaster impact,” “immediate post-impact emergency response,” and “long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction” (p. 53).

## Chapter 4 Study Methodology

This case study of the local Pensacola media's Hurricane Ivan coverage looks at how Hurricane Ivan affected the local media's messages and the delivery of those messages to the public; and the local media's unique ability to provide a valuable public service to its community during disasters. Hurricane Ivan's landfall near Pensacola, Florida on September 15, 2004 provides an opportunity to explore the activities of the local media during a major natural disaster.

The case study approach allows an analysis of a variety of sources to investigate the opportunities that the Pensacola media had to serve their community during Hurricane Ivan and how they responded to those opportunities. The basis for this study includes interviews with eighteen local Pensacola media professionals who represent thirteen different Pensacola media organizations and Escambia County, several local press releases and internal documents, and local newspaper articles. The information from these interviews and documents will present a picture of what messages the Pensacola media organizations focused on communicating throughout the storm, why they focused on those particular messages and how they went about communicating them to the public. This study will look at the abilities of the local media organizations to adapt their skills and resources to respond to the specific needs that the public had during Hurricane Ivan.

### *Selection of Media Organizations to Include*

When framing this study it was important to determine which media organizations would be included. A basic qualification was that the organizations needed to be local

Pensacola media. For the print news media this was fairly straightforward. Although residents may have access to a variety of specialty papers, for daily news Pensacola, like many cities, only has one daily newspaper—the Gannett owned *Pensacola News Journal*. However, defining which broadcast media are local is more complex because broadcast signals can easily cross multiple county and state lines. A number of radio and television signals originating from other cities can be received in Pensacola and vice versa. For the purpose of this study, the *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 2005* listings for the city of Pensacola are used to define the local Pensacola broadcast organizations. The 2005 edition was chosen as the most accurate account of the Pensacola broadcast marketplace for this study since it was published at the end of 2004 just months after Hurricane Ivan made landfall near Pensacola.

The *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 2005* lists 15 radio stations licensed in Pensacola, Florida—seven AM stations and eight FM stations (Jessell, 2005, pp. D-137, 138). While a complete listing of these stations detailing their formats and ownership can be found in Table 4.1, they break down into ten music formats, two religious formats, two news formats, and one hybrid music/news format. Four of these stations—WCOA (AM-1370), WPNN (AM-790), WUWF (FM-88.1), and WYCL (FM-107.3) — are listed in *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 2005* as having news staff. Two of the FM stations (one religious station and the music/news station) are noncommercial (Jessell, 2005, pp. D-137-138).

Table 4.1

## Pensacola Radio Stations

Station	Format	Owner
WBSR (AM)	Soft Adult Cont.	Easy Media Inc.
WCOA (AM)	News/talk	Cumulus Media Inc.
WJLQ (FM)	Hot Adult Cont.	Cumulus Media Inc.
WMEZ (FM)	Soft Rock	Pamal Broadcasting Ltd.
WNVY (AM)	Black Gospel	1090-AM
WPCS (FM)	Religious/Edu.	Pensacola Christian College Inc.
WPNN (AM)	Local News/CNN	Miracle Radio Inc.
WRNE (AM)	Urban Oldies/Gspl.	Media One Communications Inc.
WRRX (FM)*	Rock	Cumulus Media Inc.
WTKX-FM	Active Rock	Clear Channel Communications Inc.
WUWF (FM)	PRI/NPR	University of West Florida
WVTJ (AM)	Religious/Praise	610-AM
WXBM-FM**	Country	Pamal Broadcasting Ltd.
WYCL (FM)	60s & 70s	Clear Channel Communications Inc.
WYCT (FM)	Country	ADX Communications of Pensacola
WZNO (AM)	Southern Gospel	1230-AM Broadcasting Corp.

Source: Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 2005

\* WRRX is licensed in Gulf Breeze, Florida see footnote 3 on page 27 for explanation of why it is included in this list

\*\* While WXBM is listed under Pensacola stations, its full listing is found under Milton, Florida where it is licensed.

The *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 2005* lists television stations by their Nielsen Designated Market Area (DMA) instead of the city of license. The Pensacola community is in the Mobile, AL-Pensacola (Ft. Walton Beach), FL DMA which contains 14 stations and encompasses eleven counties in Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida (Jessell, 2005, pp. B-23-24). Table 4.2 gives a complete breakdown of the cities, ownership and networks of these stations, but out of the 14 stations, six are based in Mobile, Alabama, five are based in Pensacola, Florida, one is based in Panama City, Florida, one (a PBS station) is based in Birmingham, Alabama, and one was not yet on the air. Only five of the 14 stations—WALA-TV (10), WEAR-TV(3), WEIQ (42), WKRG-TV (5), and WPMI-TV (15)— are listed as having news personnel and only one of these, WEAR-TV (3), is based in Pensacola. Three of the other stations, WALA-TV (10), WKRG-TV (5), and WPMI-TV (15), are based in Mobile while WEIQ (42) is based in Birmingham (Jessell, 2005, pp. B-23-24).

While the physical location of a station within a market is not an issue in Nielsen's ratings of television stations, it can be important when studying disasters because some disasters may impact one part of the market differently than other parts of the market. This may mean that different parts of the DMA may have different informational needs than other parts of the DMA. Hurricane Ivan basically split the Mobile, AL-Pensacola (Ft. Walton Beach), FL DMA in half and had a much heavier

Table 4.2

## Mobile, AL-Pensacola (Ft. Walton Beach), FL Designated Market Area Stations

Station	Channel	Network	City of Origin
WALA-TV	10	Fox	Mobile, AL
WAWD	58	Independent	Panama City, FL
WBPG	55	WB	Mobile, AL
WEAR-TV	3	ABC	Pensacola, FL
WEIQ	42	PBS	Birmingham, AL
WFBD	48	--	Not on air
WFGX	35	Independent	Pensacola, FL
WHBR	33	Religious	Pensacola, FL
WJTC	44	UPN	Mobile, AL
WKRK-TV	5	CBS	Mobile, AL
WMPV-TV	21	TBN	Mobile, AL
WPAN	53	Independent	Pensacola, FL
WPMI-TV	15	NBC	Mobile, AL
WSRE	23	PBS	Pensacola, FL

Source: Broadcasting &amp; Cable Yearbook 2005



impact on the east side of the market (where Pensacola, Florida is located) than on the west side of the market (where Mobile, Alabama is located).<sup>2</sup>

Since the informational needs of Escambia County Florida were much different than the informational needs of Mobile County Alabama, the broadcast media originating in the different cities emphasized the needs of their immediate communities. An example of this can be seen in the Clear Channel Communications Inc. owned broadcast stations. At the time Ivan made landfall, Clear Channel owned a total of eight broadcast stations in Mobile and Pensacola: four radio stations and two television stations located in Mobile and two radio stations located in Pensacola (Jessell, 2005). According to Joel Sampson, the Programming Director of WTKX-FM (101.5), five of these stations—one television station and two radio stations in Mobile and the two radio stations in Pensacola—were set up to simulcast their hurricane coverage to take advantage of the group's resources. Sampson said that before Ivan they did simulcast on all five stations for awhile, but when it became apparent that Pensacola was going to be impacted more than Mobile, the Mobile stations split off from the Pensacola stations in order to better serve the needs of the Mobile community. This left the two Pensacola radio stations to serve the Pensacola community (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007).

An assumption could be made that the four radio stations and four television stations (excluding the PBS station based in Birmingham) that had news personnel would be the primary local media organizations involved with the Hurricane Ivan coverage; and

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<sup>2</sup> As noted earlier, the northeastern side of the storm was the strongest part of the storm and it had more of an impact on communities like Pensacola which were to the east of the eye while communities like Mobile which were located to the west of the eye experienced less of an impact.

that since Mobile was impacted differently than Pensacola was impacted that WEAR-TV (3) would be the primary television station covering the storm from Pensacola's perspective. However just focusing on stations with news personnel could potentially omit some organizations that were committed to covering Hurricane Ivan for the Pensacola community. To determine which organizations were committed, local media organizations that stationed personnel at the Escambia Emergency Operations Center (EEOC) in downtown Pensacola were the primary organizations included in this study. Stationing people at the EEOC demonstrated a commitment to provide emergency information that was specific to Escambia County residents.

WXBM-FM (102.7) morning announcer Marty White said that the EEOC was important because that is where all the official information is coming from "and you don't want to give out anything that's not official" (personal communication, January 25, 2007). He also said that it is also important to physically be at the EEOC because when the different agencies start shutting things down, they do not have the personnel to be answering the phones to get out the information to the media. They want the stations there so they can easily get out the information (M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

A list of which local media organizations stationed personnel at the EEOC during the storm was compiled through several interviews with people who were stationed there during Hurricane Ivan. According to EEOC participants, the local media outlets that were represented at the EEOC were: the *Pensacola News Journal*, WEAR-TV (3), WCOA

(AM-1370), WJLQ (FM-100.7), WMEZ (FM-94.1), WPNN (AM-790), WRRX (FM-106.1),<sup>3</sup> WTKX-FM (101.5), WUWF (FM-88.1), WXBM-FM (102.7),<sup>4</sup> WYCL (FM-107.3), and WYCT (FM-98.7) ( S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007; S. Daniel, personal communication, March 3, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007).<sup>5</sup> A purposive sample of media personnel from these organizations was interviewed.<sup>6</sup> As an additional source, personnel from WSRE (23) were also interviewed (even though it did not fit within the original purposive sample) because after the storm it demonstrated a commitment to the Pensacola community by strengthening ties with media that were at the EEOC and by producing some public service programming aimed at helping the recovery efforts.

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<sup>3</sup> WRRX (FM-106.1), which is licensed to nearby Gulf Breeze, Florida does not show up in the *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 2005* Pensacola listing. However, since it is owned by Cumulus Media Inc., its studios are located at the same Pensacola address as WCOA (AM-1370) and WJLQ (FM-100.7); and it mirrored their Hurricane Ivan coverage. Also, while WRRX (FM-106.1) is listed in the *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 2005* as not on air, both Brian Newkirk and Don Parker said it was being used during Hurricane Ivan. (B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007)

<sup>4</sup> While WXBM's call letters are found in the *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 2005* Pensacola listing, its full listing is under its city of license which is Milton, Florida which is near Pensacola, Florida.

<sup>5</sup> Other media outlets, such as the television stations based in Mobile, Alabama, obtained information from the EEOC by phone, but they did not have people stationed there (S. Daniel, personal communication, March 3, 2007)

<sup>6</sup> There were three group owners represented by these stations. Interviewees of one station in each group were interviewed to represent the activities of the group as a whole.

### *Selection of Media Personnel to Interview*

The eighteen people who were interviewed for this study include at least one person from each of the local media organizations represented at the EEOC plus the Escambia County Public Information Officer and personnel from WSRE (23). At each organization one or more people were identified as instrumental in the coverage of Hurricane Ivan by asking who would be best able to describe that organization's experiences during Hurricane Ivan. As a result of these inquiries, the following people were interviewed:

For the *Pensacola News Journal*, Tom Ninestine was interviewed because he was the *News Journal's* metro editor when Hurricane Ivan hit Pensacola. In this position, he was in charge of coordinating all of the localized stories in the paper.

For WEAR-TV (3), three people were interviewed. Sue Straughn, was interviewed because she was a news anchor, senior editor, and public affairs director at WEAR-TV (3) and was one of the main anchors on the air during Hurricane Ivan. Her co-anchor, Bob Solarksi, was also interviewed because he was the other main anchor on the air during Hurricane Ivan. WEAR-TV (3) Chief Meteorologist Allen Strum was also interviewed as a source for the weather related coverage.

For WCOA (AM-1370) (and representing the three Cumulus stations), Don Parker and Brian Newkirk were interviewed because both of them were on the air during Ivan. Parker, who had been working at WCOA (AM-1370) for 12 years when Ivan hit, not only had prior hurricane experience as a WCOA (AM-1370) announcer, but also

before then as an Escambia County deputy sheriff. He retired early from the sheriff's department as a captain in 1989. Brian Newkirk had worked 13 years for WCOA (AM-1370). At the time of Ivan he not only fulfilled his announcing responsibilities but he also assisted the program director. In this role, he participated in the planning of the station's programming during Ivan.

For WPNN (AM-790), John Teelin was interviewed because he not only was the news director at WPNN (AM-790), radio, but he also was stationed at the EEOC during the storm. Teelin has many years of experience with hurricanes in Pensacola. He began covering hurricanes in 1979 during Hurricane Frederic while he was working for WCOA (AM-1370). He also spent two years as Escambia County's first Public Information Officer and was in that position in 1995 when Hurricanes Erin and Opal hit Pensacola.

For WTKX-FM (101.5) (and representing the two Clear Channel owned stations), Joel Sampson was interviewed because he was the WTKX-FM (101.5) program director and did announcing both at the station and the EEOC during Ivan. At the time of Ivan he had worked at the station for about eleven years.

For WUWF (FM-88.1), Sandra Averheart was interviewed because she had been the news director there since 1996 and had worked in Pensacola news business since the mid 1980s. Averheart recommended also interviewing assistant news director Dave Dunwoody who had worked at the station for about two years prior to Ivan. John Richardson, Morning Edition host since 1999 was also interviewed because he was one

of the main WUWF (FM-88.1) announcers during Ivan. He has worked both in radio and television since 1967.

For WXBM-FM (102.7) (and representing the two Pamal owned stations), Dave Cobb and Marty White were interviewed. Dave Cobb was interviewed because he was the general manager at WXBM-FM (102.7) and WMEZ—a position that he had held for about ten years prior to Ivan. Marty White, who had been the morning announcer at WXBM-FM (102.7) for about eleven years prior to Ivan, was interviewed because he is always the person from WXBM-FM (102.7) that represents the Pamal stations at the EEOC when a storm comes near Pensacola. During Ivan, he was stationed at the EEOC for over a week.

For WYCT (FM-98.7), Jim Sanborn was interviewed because he was the new news director and morning show co-host at WYCT (FM-98.7) when Ivan made landfall. He had just been hired at the station about two weeks before Ivan, but he had been working at a variety of Pensacola radio stations since 1988.

For WSRE (23), Roland Philips was interviewed because he was the director of engineering and assistant general manager at WSRE (23) and was responsible for making sure the facilities were secured and helped plan the programming after Ivan. Herbert Gilbert was interviewed because he was the assistant director of engineering and was the person who stayed at the station during Ivan to help keep the building secure and the generator running. A third interviewee was Lloyd Patterson who is not a WSRE (23) employee but is a freelancer producer and host for some WSRE (23) programs. He was

interviewed because he hosted a nightly hurricane recovery program for the station for several weeks.

Representing Escambia County, county Public Information Officer Sonya Daniel, was interviewed because she was in charge of handling all the media inquiries and county news releases during Hurricane Ivan. She was stationed at the EEOC and worked with the media there for over a week after Hurricane Ivan hit.

### *Study Organization*

As indicated by the literature, there are a variety of ways to divide a disaster into stages. Additionally, by virtue of their inherent qualities, different types of disasters probably could be divided up into different stages. For example, disasters such as earthquakes, or tsunamis would have their mitigation and preparedness stages almost blend together into one stage because people who live in regions that may be affected by these disasters need to be ready at any time for these disasters to hit, but there is rarely much of a warning period in which the public can do much preparation before these disasters occur. Furthermore, the actual disaster's duration may only be a few minutes in length which leaves the recovery stage as the primary stage that media organizations need to plan for. On the other hand, disasters such as floods and hurricanes may come with advance warnings that give the public several days to prepare and the disaster itself may last for several hours or days. In these types of disasters the media should have plans on how to best serve the public through all of these distinct phases.

Since the purpose of this study was to specifically look at how the local Pensacola media responded to Hurricane Ivan it will forgo the mitigation stage (which occurs prior to disasters) and focus on the local media's involvement in the three stages of: preparedness (when Hurricane Ivan's landfall near Pensacola was forecast), response (when Hurricane Ivan made landfall), and recovery (after Hurricane Ivan passed the Pensacola area). While, as Vanderford, et al. (2007) demonstrated, each of these stages could probably be further subdivided into more specific stages, these three later stages of Guion et al. (2007) will be useful as an organizational tool for describing the local Pensacola media's activities and experiences throughout the Hurricane Ivan experience.



## Chapter 5 The Pensacola Media and Hurricane Ivan

### *The Pensacola Media's Contributions to Pensacola's Preparedness*

Many of the local Pensacola media considered the preparedness stage to be the most important time for the media during hurricane Ivan because that is when the public needs information about how they need to prepare. *Pensacola News Journal* Metro Editor Tom Ninestine said that a post-Ivan task force he was a member of found that providing information to residents before the storm was the biggest priority. He personally thought that getting information out before the storm was the most important part because that was when his newspaper was able to give out information that could help residents prepare themselves and their property for the coming storm (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

WEAR-TV (3) news anchor Bob Solarski also believed that the preparedness stage is the most important stage of the hurricane because that is when the television station was able to use its meteorological resources to give updates on where the storm is, where it is going and how severe it is. Additionally, the television station was also able to let people know how to prepare for the storm far enough in advance so that residents had time to evacuate if they need to (personal communication, April 19, 2007). Solarski's co-anchor Sue Straughn also said that it was important that they got out enough information before the storm because "during there is very little that anyone can do" (personal communication, April 24, 2007).

When discussing the Pensacola media as a whole, the beginning of the preparedness phase for Hurricane Ivan was not a single, one-time event because each media organization had its own way of responding to the hurricane threat. This meant that the preparedness phase was phased in over a period of several days. Organizations that began some of the earliest preparations seemed to be very aware of the storm as it made its way through the Caribbean. Ivan made its U.S. landfall on Thursday, September 16, 2004, but WEAR-TV (3), with its meteorological resources, had actually been tracking it from the time it began to develop just off the coast of Africa nearly two weeks earlier (Stewart, 2004; S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007); *News Journal* Metro Editor Tom Ninestine indicated that as early as the weekend before Ivan hit he began thinking about it as something that the paper would have to deal with (personal communication, February 15, 2007); and by Monday, September 13 – while Ivan was near Cuba and three days before it made landfall near Pensacola (Stewart, 2004) – WXBM-FM (102.7) morning announcer Marty White began setting up at the Escambia Emergency Operations Center (EEOC) to prepare for possible live broadcasts from there (M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

While several organizations started hurricane preparations while Ivan was still in the Caribbean, it was Ivan's arrival in the Gulf of Mexico that triggered many of their initial preparations for Ivan (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication May 30, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007). Ivan entered the Gulf of Mexico in

the early morning hours of September 14, 2004 – about two days before it would make landfall near Pensacola (Stewart, 2004). It was about this same time that the National Hurricane Center began warning Gulf Coast residents about Ivan. On September 13 at 10:00 pm CDT the National Hurricane Center had issued a Hurricane Watch<sup>7</sup> for a large section of the northern Gulf Coast including Pensacola, Florida. The next day at 4:00 pm. CDT the National Hurricane Center issued a Hurricane Warning<sup>8</sup> for much of that same region (Stewart, 2004). Many of the Pensacola media organizations cited one or more of these three events as important milestones in their coverage preparations.

By the time the Hurricane Warning was issued most Pensacola media organizations appear to have been fully engaged in preparing for Ivan. During this preparedness stage, media organizations were not only concerned with helping the public prepare for the storm but also with making sure their personnel were personally prepared for the approaching hurricane. Having personal preparations out of the way would then allow them to better concentrate on doing their jobs. Tom Ninestine said that when the *Pensacola News Journal* went into “hurricane mode” after Ivan entered the Gulf of Mexico he was primarily focused on making sure *News Journal* employees were personally ready by doing things such as filling their vehicles up with gas and getting cash (personal communication, February 15, 2007). Similarly, Sandra Averheart, news director for public radio station WUWF (FM-88.1), said that when there was a Hurricane Warning station personnel began making sure that their homes were ready, that they had

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<sup>7</sup> A Hurricane Watch means that hurricane force winds “are possible” in 48 hours. (National Hurricane Center, nd, Glossary)

<sup>8</sup> A Hurricane Warning means that hurricane force winds “are expected” in 36 hours. (National Hurricane Center, nd, Glossary)

the supplies they needed and that their bags were packed so that they could be there at the station when the storm was hitting (personal communication, February 20, 2007).

WEAR-TV (3) news anchor Bob Solarski said that for his personal preparations, he was most concerned about getting his family out of town before the storm so that he could then work through the storm without worrying about them, but for himself he just made sure he had some extra clothes with him at the station (personal communication, April 19, 2007). WEAR-TV (3) chief meteorologist Allen Strum was less concerned about preparing personally for the storm. He said that he did what he could to his home, but that he did not worry about it too much because he is busy working at the station before, during and after the storm (A. Strum, personal communication, February 8, 2007).

In addition to making sure employees had their personal plans in place, the media organizations also used the preparation stage to plan their storm coverage. *News Journal* Metro Editor Tom Ninestine said that in preparation for Ivan he came up with a plan to have his reporters in position all around the city. He worked to “geographically divide the staff up” so that if travel was difficult after the storm they would still be able to evaluate and report on the conditions around the city. This positioning of human resources seemed to be Ninestine’s primary professional focus in this preparations stage and once everyone was in place and ready then they just “hunkered down” in their positions and waited for the storm to arrive (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

The Cumulus Media-owned radio stations—WCOA (AM-1370), WJLQ (FM-100.7) & WRRX (FM-106.1)—prepared by having more formal planning sessions. WCOA’s Brian Newkirk said that they prepared for Ivan by holding meetings with different departments such as engineering and traffic to plan a coordinated “team” response among the various departments and the three stations. They also set up their reporters at the EEOC and had the engineering department hook them up so that they could do live broadcasts, scheduled Hurricane Ivan updates four times an hour, made sure that they were coordinated with the various local agencies to make sure they could get information from them, and made plans to simulcast news/talk station WCOA (AM-1370) over the two FM stations—they started doing this about a day before Ivan came ashore (B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007).

According to Dave Cobb, general manager of WXBM-FM (102.7) and WMEZ (FM-94.1), he didn’t have to develop many plans prior to Ivan. He said that his stations’ preparations for Hurricane Ivan were 90% to 95% according to established station policy (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007). WXBM-FM (102.7) morning announcer Marty White said that Hurricanes Erin and Opal which hit Pensacola in 1995 had helped them establish the policies that they used during Ivan (personal communication, January 25, 2007). Cobb called it a “pretty regimented system” (personal communication, January 25, 2007). When the Hurricane Watch was issued they started activating plans as part of the Pensacola storm network. Which meant that WXBM-FM (102.7) began to carry WEAR-TV (3) updates twice an hour and that White began to give updates from the Escambia County Emergency Operations Center (D. Cobb, personal

communication, January 25, 2007). When the Hurricane Watch escalated into a Hurricane Warning Marty White “bunkered in permanently” at the EEOC and remained there for several days until both he and Cobb agreed that he did not have to be there anymore (M. White, personal communication, January 25, 200).

Other organizations had much less formal plans. Local public radio station WUWF (FM-88.1) did not have a written policy detailing a hurricane plan. It is licensed to and located on the campus of the University of West Florida, but the University’s general hurricane policy did not apply to the radio station’s situation. It was just understood by employees that the news people were expected to be at the station during hurricanes. The involvement of other station personnel depended on the individual situations. The station primarily relied on the hurricane experience of its personnel to determine its response to Hurricane Ivan (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

As part of their Hurricane preparations, several of the broadcast outlets also began putting plans for a “hurricane network” in place to allow cooperation between various media organizations. This loose network was a cooperative between WEAR-TV (3), WCOA (AM-1370), WXBM-FM (102.7), WPNN (AM-790) and WUWF (FM-88.1). Information from this network was also at times simulcast on WJLQ (FM-100.7) and WRRX (FM-106.1), the sister stations of WCOA (AM-1370), and WMEZ (FM-94.1), the sister station of WXBM-FM (102.7) (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007; B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007).

Under normal circumstances, many of these stations are on some level competitors in the Pensacola media marketplace, but they did not find it difficult to work together during Hurricane Ivan. WXBM's Marty White said that there was not much of a transition from being competitors to helping each other out because many of the personnel in the Pensacola media have been around the market for a long time and many have worked together at other radio stations in the past (personal communication, January 25, 2007). WPNN part-time newscaster John Teelin, who was a reporter for WCOA (AM-1370) in the 1970s and served as Escambia County's first Public Information Officer in the 1990s, said that he thinks it is the role of the stations to work together and forget that they are competitors (personal communication, February 22, 2007). WEAR-TV (3) Anchor Bob Solarski's perspective is that "all news is a cooperative," and in this spirit WEAR-TV also feed information to and received information from ABC, CNN and the Florida News Network in addition to its involvement with the local radio stations (personal communication, April 19, 2007).

The advantage of this informal network was that the different media organizations have different strengths and the network allows them to share resources. Bob Solarski said that WEAR-TV (3) relied on the radio station announcers as "stringers" that supplemented WEAR-TV's own staff, and that the radio stations are able to use WEAR-TV (3) for weather information since most radio stations do not have meteorologists on staff (B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007). WCOA (AM-1370) announcer Don Parker echoed this thought when he cited WEAR-TV's larger staff and resources as a reason that WCOA (AM-1370) simulcast the television broadcast

(personal communication, May, 30, 2007). Bob Solarski also said that WEAR-TV (3) benefited from the additional outlets that the radio stations provided. The more stations that the television station was networked with, the greater chance it had of keeping its information on the air throughout the storm (B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007).

As an example of the cooperation that occurred, WPNN's John Teelin said that he and WXBM's Marty White were the two people that would do reports from the EEOC for WEAR-TV (3) (personal communication, February 22, 2007). These WEAR-TV (3) broadcasts were then, in turn, carried on many of the radio stations. According to WXBM-FM (102.7) and WMEZ General Manager Dave Cobb, the hurricane network stations count on Marty White and John Teelin to get information from the EEOC because they are all spread thin (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007). WUWF (FM-88.1) News Director Sandra Averheart said that having access to this network allowed WUWF (FM-88.1) to use its personnel elsewhere (personal communication, February 20, 2007).

In addition to the sharing of resources, another benefit of this hurricane network was the collaborative management of information. Marty White said that they work at making sure everyone has all the critical information (personal communication, January 25, 2007). Dave Cobb said that this is important because the challenge was to make sure that all outlets were all putting out correct information. If different outlets had put out



conflicting information, they could cause confusion (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

While these hurricane network stations all used the network as a resource they each used it differently. As discussed earlier, WEAR-TV (3) supplemented its broadcasts with information it got from the radio announcers (B. Solariski, personal communication, April 19, 2007). Similarly, when a Hurricane Watch was issued, Dave Cobb said that WXBW-FM (102.7) used WEAR-TV (3) for hurricane updates twice an hour (personal communication, January 25, 2007), and Don Parker said that WCOA (AM-1370) used the television broadcasts “as a relief to allow us to get everything from just getting a cup of coffee, and going to the bathroom, and making phone calls and so on” (personal communication, May, 30, 2007).

Locally-owned AM station WPNN’s strong ties with WEAR-TV (3) made usage of WEAR-TV’s broadcasts a natural choice for its hurricane coverage.<sup>9</sup> During Ivan, when a Hurricane Watch was issued, WPNN (AM-790) used some of the WEAR-TV (3) coverage. However, when the Hurricane Center issued a Hurricane Warning and WEAR-TV (3) went to full-time coverage, WPNN (AM-790) began to just simulcast the television station’s broadcast “a lot of times, it’s the easiest thing to do,” Teelin said (personal communication, February 22, 2007).

While this storm network connecting WEAR-TV (3) with the radio stations was an important part of the hurricane coverage, it was not the only networking between

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<sup>9</sup> WPNN (AM-790) has partnered with WEAR-TV (3) for many years to simulcast their daily newscasts. (J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007)

broadcast stations during Hurricane Ivan. Joel Sampson, Programming Director for WTKX-FM (101.5) said that the Clear Channel owned stations had extensive hurricane plans which included using the resources of other Clear Channel stations along the Gulf Coast. These stations share information on a website that they call The Gulf Coast Storm Alert Network. WTKX-FM (101.5) and WYCL (FM-107.3) also teamed up with WPMI-TV (15), the Mobile NBC affiliate, to use its meteorology resources. For a time, they also participated in a simulcast on several Clear Channel stations that were located in Mobile and Pensacola; however, that simulcast only occurred until about 6:00 the evening before Ivan made landfall. By that point it was clear that Pensacola was going to get the main impact from the storm so the Mobile stations did not need to give the same information to their audiences that the Pensacola stations needed to give out (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007).

Not all radio stations had made plans to network with other stations. Locally owned WYCT (FM-98.7) had been in existence for less than a year before Hurricane Ivan and was without any local partners. News Director and morning show co-host Jim Sanborn said he would have liked to have been a part of WEAR-TV's network, but that since WEAR-TV (3) was already partnered with WXBW-FM (102.7), a direct competitor with WYCT's country format, there was a resistance to letting WYCT (FM-98.7) join it (personal communication, April, 4, 2007). Therefore, even though staff from both WXBW-FM (102.7) and WYCT (FM-98.7) said they thought it was in the public's interest to have as many radio stations as possible involved with the hurricane network (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal

communication, April, 4, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007), the competitive barrier between the stations was too strong to be overcome by even a joint interest in the public good. Without any outside help, WYCT (FM-98.7) had to rely solely on its own personnel. Sanborn said that all WYCT (FM-98.7) employees—even the sales staff—worked together as a team to get out information (personal communication, April, 4, 2007).

Other stations were not even concerned with trying to network with other stations. Local PBS station WSRE (23) did not attempt to give out hurricane information before the storm because of limited resources. Roland Philips the Director of Engineering and Assistant General Manager said that while WSRE's policy was to try and stay on the air as long as possible, they do not have a news staff so they did not attempt to gather information like the news stations did (personal communication, June 12, 2007). Instead, WSRE (23) was more in self-preservation mode before the storm. Assistant Director of Engineering Herbert Gilbert said that in the hours before Ivan's arrival, he was "battening down doors," working on the generators and covering up computers to prepare for Ivan (personal communication, June 12, 2007).

#### *The Pensacola Media's Contributions to Pensacola's Response*

As Hurricane Ivan neared landfall, the focus started to switch from preparing the public for Ivan to responding to Ivan's arrival. There appears to have been some overlap between the preparedness and response stages as this transition seems to have started after the National Hurricane Center issued a Hurricane Warning that included the

Pensacola area about a day before Ivan made landfall. This is when WEAR-TV (3) started its wall-to-wall coverage of the storm, (A. Strum, personal communication, February 8, 2007) when WPNN (AM-790) started simulcasting the WEAR-TV (3) signal non-stop (J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007), and when WCOA (AM-1370), WTKX-FM (101.5), WUWF (FM-88.1), WXBM-FM (102.7), and WYCT (FM-98.7) began airing regular updates about the storm (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007; A. Strum, personal communication, February 8, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

Initially, even some of the activities at this time were focused on preparedness. Joel Sampson said that in addition to giving hurricane updates two or three times an hour WTKX-FM (101.5) and WYCL (FM-107.3) also played prerecorded public service announcements in order to let people know what they should be doing to prepare for the storm. He said that these PSAs were played according to a planned schedule that corresponded with the hurricane's proximity to Pensacola. They reminded people to do things such as securing their lawn furniture and making sure their prescriptions were filled (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007).

As time went by, however, and the outer bands of the hurricane approached, the media gradually transitioned into giving more response type of information. When Ivan got closer to Pensacola the media got to a stage where they thought that the public should

have competed preparations for the hurricane and they started talking about how people could stay safe as Ivan came ashore. Both John Teelin and Don Parker said that the Pensacola area's experience with Hurricane Opal in 1995 impacted the area's concept of how and when evacuation should take place.<sup>10</sup> They said that they no longer encourage people to evacuate when the storm gets too close (D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007). Teelin said that if people were going to evacuate they should do so at least 36 hours before the storm's predicted landfall (personal communication, February 22, 2007).

Right before Ivan made landfall WXBM's Marty White was giving his listeners last minute information that might help them stay safe during the storm. He said that while his listeners could tell when the winds were about to pick up as the storm approached he wanted to be sure that they knew details such as which areas would have their water turned off and at what point the bridges would be closed. "The biggest thing we try to impress on people is 'don't take the storms too lightly'" he said (M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007). WEAR-TV (3) news anchor Bob Solarski said that when the storm was arriving the advisory role of the media was over because at that point "wherever they [residents] are is where they are going to be for hours if not days" (personal communication, April 19, 2007).

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<sup>10</sup> Parker said that because Opal grew in strength so quickly it caused the public to panic and the mass evacuation caused many traffic problems. He thinks that the media's announcements may have even contributed to the problem because in 1995 the "common thinking was evacuate." (personal communication, May, 30, 2007) Teelin said this led to people being stuck on the roads in traffic when the storm hit. He said that Opal taught them the concept of "sheltering in place" where only those who actually needed to evacuate were encouraged to evacuate and those who had a secure shelter should stay put.(J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007

While the advisory role may have been over, some of the media personnel thought that the information they provided at this time served a more cathartic than informational role for the audience. WEAR-TV's Sue Straughn thinks that when the storm was coming ashore that the local television station served as the public's eyes and ears. They could use their video equipment to satisfy the public's curiosity about what was happening outside and then when the power went out they used their radio simulcast to be a comforting voice to let people know they were not alone (S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007). Many media personnel also acknowledged the importance of having experienced announcers on during the storm because they know how to maintain a calm tone on the air to help people get through the storm without panicking (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

While the public may have been using the media as a companion during the storm, many Pensacola area residents also participated in the coverage by calling the various media organizations during the storm. Local media organizations reported receiving hundreds of phone calls throughout the night from people who either wanted to relay information to the media or who wanted to ask for information and advice (B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007;

J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007; B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007; A. Strum, personal communication, February 8, 2007; S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007). Solarski thinks that most people call in just because they want someone to talk to, but that others want to give the media information because they want to feel like they are part of the conversation so they will call in to describe what is happening where they are. “We provide someone to see, someone to listen to. A sense of community. . . It’s like a clearing house” he said (B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007).

These phone calls were put on the air for a variety of reasons. One of the reasons that some organizations put phone calls on the air was to help fill air time. Bob Solarski said that WEAR-TV (3) first started putting these callers on the air during Hurricanes Erin and Opal in 1995 because they found that it was a great way to fill time when they didn’t have anything else to say. He said that back then, they quickly found out that there were many people who would call in to talk on the air about a wide variety of topics (B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007). Less pragmatically, Sue Straughn said that during Ivan these callers helped satisfy the natural curiosity of people who were wondering what was happening in other places and that they also helped pass the time during a time in which there was very little useful information that the broadcasters could be giving out (S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007). Parker said he thinks that putting these callers on the air provides a great sense of community and comfort to both the callers and the audience (personal communication, May, 30, 2007).

Broadcast organizations had different philosophies on how to best use these callers on the air. Some personnel stressed getting as many people on the air as possible. Jim Sanborn thought that allowing the public to have open lines on WYCT (FM-98.7) to get as much information out as possible was the priority and that he did not give the consequences much thought. He was not concerned about people doing things such as cursing on the air because he said that the benefits of the immediacy of the information outweighed potential problems (J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007). Solarski also said he was not that concerned with what people might say on the air because in his experience he has found that people are respectful of the situation during hurricanes and that nobody has broken his trust by calling in hoaxes or anything such as that (personal communication, April 19, 2007). Straughn said that the WEAR-TV (3) producers who are taking the phone calls might filter out a few people who are drunk or just wanting to rant, but everyone else is put on the air (personal communication, April 24, 2007). WCOA's Don Parker acknowledged that putting callers live on the air carries certain risks with it, but his approach was to evaluate the information that the callers were giving out and then try to minimize the dissemination of bogus information or rumors if that was attempted. However, Parker knew that in reality it is hard to verify everything before it goes out (D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007).

While putting these callers on the air was a common practice, not all Pensacola media professionals thought it was a good idea to do so. WPNN's John Teelin was one of the few people who expressed concern with the practice. "To indiscriminately put phone callers on the air, that's inviting yourself to broadcast all sorts of misinformation," he



said. He thinks that during a hurricane situation it is very important to control the situation and verify all information before it goes over the air (J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007).

Other organizations focused on the phone calls as a channel to disseminate information by simply using the phones to give information to callers. WUWF (FM-88.1) received many phone calls through the night, but not because callers were being put on the air, these were people who were calling the station for information. The station set up a phone bank with several of their employees answering phones and providing information to callers. Averheart said that they basically had an information center at the phone bank so that the people answering the phones had access to all the same information that the announcers had. This allowed them to take care of the callers' questions without the announcers having to get involved (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007). Similarly, the *Pensacola News Journal* also received many phone calls throughout the storm from people who wanted to get information. Metro Editor Tom Ninestine said that the *News Journal* received many phone calls from people in Escambia County who wanted to know what was happening in Santa Rosa County which did not get much coverage in the media. The News Journal staff did their best to answer questions and dispel rumors. They "did a lot of hand holding," he said (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

As Ivan came ashore and the effects intensified, the calls took media personnel outside of their expertise as they became more emergency oriented. Many members of the media remembered taking 911-type phone calls from people whose houses were flooding or falling apart. WEAR-TV (3) Chief Meteorologist Allen Strum said that the phone call he most remembered was one that they did not even broadcast over the air. It was from a family who feared for their lives. Their house was flooded, their furniture was floating, and their children were standing up on the counters. They called WEAR-TV (3) wanting advice because they did not know what to do. Strum said that he did not really know what to tell them he just told them to not go outside and hoped for the best (personal communication, February 8, 2007).

Jim Sanborn said that WYCT (FM-98.7) received a phone call from a couple of people who were up in their attic because their house was flooding and they wanted advice on what they should do (personal communication, April, 4, 2007). WCOA's Brian Newkirk remembered talking to a man who just had part of his roof blow off. Newkirk said he was "speechless" and did not know what to say (personal communication, January 16, 2007). Phone calls such as these put media personnel into a position where they were being asked to help people make critical decisions about things beyond their expertise.

Ivan's high winds gradually knocked out electrical power to most of the Pensacola area. Most of the media professionals agreed that the loss of power most impacted the television station. Both radio and television personnel assume that if

residents lose power they will rely primarily on radio for information during the storm (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007; A. Strum, personal communication, February 8, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

WEAR-TV (3) personnel said they were aware that they went from being a television station to being a radio station as people lost power. Without power they know that people might not be able to watch television, but they believed that most people had a battery powered radio that they could use to listen to WEAR-TV's simulcast on one of their partner radio stations (B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007; A. Strum, personal communication, February 8, 2007). Solarski said that as they started receiving reports of power outages he became more and more aware that his audience was not seeing the station's video information so he went into more of a radio mode where he would describe all of the graphics and visuals for the radio audience (personal communication, April 19, 2007). In fact the WEAR-TV (3) air staff was not very concerned about the potential for the station's transmitter to go off the air because they knew that until power and cable were restored, they would be relying on the radio stations to deliver their signals to the

majority of the audience anyway (B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007).<sup>11</sup>

While WEAR-TV (3) personnel were confident that their broadcasts would be heard on one of their radio partners, the radio station personnel, were very concerned about the state of their transmitters because they knew that if they didn't have a transmitter, they had no way to disseminate their information. In fact most of the radio stations did go off the air at some time during the height of the storm due to a variety of technical problems. Stations such as public radio station WUWF (FM-88.1), Clear Channel owned WTKX-FM (101.5) and WYCL (FM-107.3) and Cumulus owned station WJLQ (FM-100.7) had minor problems that only took them off the air for a few hours (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007). Other stations such as WXBM-FM (102.7) had very serious damage at the tower. It was knocked off the air around 10:00 Wednesday night and personnel were not able to make repairs and get the station back on the air for over five days (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007). Similarly, Cumulus owned WCOA (AM-1370) and WYCL (FM-107.3), and locally owned WPNN (AM-790) were knocked off the air for several days as well (B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007). Only one

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix A for a timeline of when power was restored to residents after the storm. This gives an indication of the potential growth of the viewership for WEAR in the weeks following Ivan.

station, WYCT (FM-98.7), which had its studio located right beside its transmitter site, was able to stay on the air throughout the entire night (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007).

While WYCT (FM-98.7) was proud to be able to claim that it was the only Pensacola based radio station to stay on the air throughout Hurricane Ivan, personnel at other stations such as WCOA (AM-1370), WJLQ (FM-100.7), WRRX (FM-106.1), WTKX-FM (101.5), WUWF (FM-88.1) and WYCL (FM-107.3) did not think it was a disadvantage for them to be off the air at the height of the storm because at that time there was not a lot of new information that they could be giving out anyway. It was more important to them that they were able to be back on the air again the next morning (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007). In fact Sampson said that when his stations went off the air between 2:00-3:00am he tuned into WYCT (FM-98.7) for about 20 minutes and it was just playing solid music at that point anyway (personal communication, March 13, 2007). After their stations went off the air, most of the announcers took that opportunity to get a couple of hours of sleep so that they would be ready to go again when they got back on the air (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Sampson, personal

communication, March 13, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

While many of the broadcast media were hampered by technical difficulties caused by the strong winds, the *Pensacola News Journal* personnel were able to keep working through the night. Its facilities, which are located in downtown Pensacola only a few blocks from Pensacola Bay, lost power and experienced some flooding after the winds blew the electronically controlled front doors open, but even under these conditions the staff was able to continue its work of publishing Thursday's newspaper (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007; R. Philips, personal communication, June 12, 2007).

#### *The Pensacola Media's Contributions to Pensacola's Recovery*

After Ivan's winds started dying down in the Pensacola area, the media personnel who were covering the storm had to shift their focus from response information to recovery information. This transition was summed up by WTKX-FM (101.5) Programming Director, Joel Sampson who said after his stations went off the air that night, he took a nap for about 90 minutes. He said that as soon as he woke up from that nap, he had to reset his information mode from "here comes the storm, here comes the storm. To here's the information—okay the storm has been here—here's what's next" (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007).

For many media organizations, what was next was that they had to first confront the damage Ivan caused to their own facilities before they could help the community in

its recovery efforts. While several radio stations were busy for the next few days repairing their facilities, WYCT (FM-98.7) was the only Pensacola radio station on the air during the early morning hours of September 16 (J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007); however, that situation did not last long. Clear Channel crews were able to get WYCL (FM-107.3) back on the air before sunrise by simply refueling the generator that powered the microwave link out to the transmitter site (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007), and WUWF (FM-88.1) got back on the air around 6:00am when the winds died down enough for a maintenance person from the University of West Florida to clear trees out of the way so that the microwave link between the station and the transmitter could be fixed<sup>12</sup> (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

While none of these three radio stations had networking partnerships with each other and they all had different formats and owners, their messages were very similarly focused on public safety—all three placed an early emphasis on getting people to stay in their houses or shelters (J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4). WYCT (FM-98.7) News Director Jim Sanborn said that as soon as Ivan passed Pensacola and the Hurricane Center was no longer issuing advisories for the area, he started reminding people that they should stay in their homes and not go

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<sup>12</sup> Richardson was actually under the misconception that at the time they got back on the air that WUWF was the only station on the air. (personal communication, February 20, 2007)

out and look around because of the danger of downed power lines (personal communication, April, 4, 2007). WUWF (FM-88.1) morning announcer John Richardson and Clear Channel manager Joel Sampson both emphasized that people needed to stay off the roads (J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007). Richardson told his audience to stay off the roads to give the authorities time to get out and make assessments—he said he wanted to keep people off the roads because he knew that downed power lines would make the roads impassable (J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007).

In order to provide more than just general warnings to their audiences, these stations also placed a priority on getting out the official word on what had happened. WUWF (FM-88.1) News Director Sonya Averheart and local Morning Edition host John Richardson said that when they first got back on the air they started calling all of their official sources to find out what the damage was so that they could tell people what had happened to the community (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007). Across town at WYCL (FM-107.3) Joel Sampson also focused on getting out as much official information as possible because he thought that the more information he could get out about situation, the less people would go outside to sightsee. “You cannot feed me enough information,” he said. “People are going to be just starving for what’s going on—what happened. How bad was it. How bad is the damage” (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007).



However, Sampson was challenged to get the official information from the Escambia Emergency Operations Center. He knew that was where all the information would be and he had a person stationed there with remote equipment, but he did not have a way to communicate with him. His solution was to get a friend from the Sheriff's Department to take an employee over to the EEOC (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007). Sampson thought that the EEOC was more important as a source of information after the storm than before because before the storm hit he could get much of the same information that the EEOC had through other sources, but after the storm it was "very valuable" as a source of information (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007).

Another reason that Sampson thought it was so important to get information from the EEOC (other than the pragmatic reason that the EEOC was where the official information was) was that he wanted there to be a unity of information across the three stations. Sampson said that since there were only three stations on the air they knew that they each had a very large share of the audience. He said that they all wanted to be on the same page and to be giving out the same information to ensure it was accurate. They did not want a situation where one station gave out wrong information. He said that all three stations knew that this was an opportunity to show radio's value during a disaster so they helped each other out by sharing information and equipment (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007).

While these three stations were the main source of information for the Pensacola community through the morning hours of September 16, other radio stations started coming back on the air that afternoon. WTKX-FM (101.5) was the next station to begin broadcasting again when it joined its Clear Channel sister station WYCL (FM-107.3) on the air around noon. While its tower had snapped off just above the WTKX-FM (101.5) antenna, the damage was not severe and Clear Channel crews were able to get it back on the air with a low power signal that just covered the city of Pensacola (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007).

That afternoon, WJLQ (FM-100.7), was the first of the Cumulus owned stations to get back on the air. This allowed the WCOA (AM-1370) news staff to finally join in on the post-hurricane coverage using WJLQ's signal (D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007). Getting back on the air quickly after Ivan was important to WCOA (AM-1370) personnel because they want to be known as a "community station." Morning announcer Don Parker called the broadcasting of emergency information a "primary responsibility" of WCOA (AM-1370) (personal communication, May, 30, 2007). The information they broadcast included everything from basic convenience information such as where people could get ice and what stores were open, to public safety information such as locations of downed power lines and road flooding. Some of this was provided by phone callers giving eye-witness reports of safety hazards around the community (D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007).

While the radio stations were challenged with getting antennas, transmitters and microwave links back on the air,<sup>13</sup> the *Pensacola News Journal* had other challenges hampering its ability to reach the public. Unlike many radio stations which went down at some point during the hurricane, the *News Journal* was able to continue working through the night to put the Thursday edition together. In spite of the storm, the *News Journal* did not miss a single day of publishing the paper, but it did have to send several editions to sister papers to be published.

Publishing was only part of the battle, however, because the papers still had to be brought back to Pensacola and distributed to subscribers. On Thursday and Friday a variety of problems such as road conditions, lack of carriers and curfews kept the *News Journal* from being able to distribute those papers;<sup>14</sup> but these two editions did not go to waste. The *News Journal* distributed Thursday's edition with Saturday's edition and Friday's edition with Sunday's edition so that subscribers eventually received all their papers for the week (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

Metro Editor Tom Ninestine said he thought that it was important to get the paper out to the public to help dispel rumors and to let people could see pictures of what had happened (personal communication, February 15, 2007). The *News Journal* had already been posting these pictures and stories on its website, but most residents who remained in

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<sup>13</sup> WYCL (FM-107.3) got back on the air about two days after Ivan hit (D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007), but WCOA (AM-1370), WXBM and WPNN (AM-790) took about a week to get back on the air. (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007; B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007)

<sup>14</sup> A curfew was imposed on Escambia County at 7:00 on September 15 and was kept in place until September 27. (S. Woodbery, personal communication, August 28, 2009)

Pensacola did not have the electrical power or Internet connection that was necessary to view the online edition. This meant that receiving these editions on Saturday and Sunday provided many residents with the first glimpses of the destruction Ivan had caused outside of their neighborhoods (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

While these media organizations were busy getting out the early recovery information to the community, other organizations could not participate in the coverage because of the damage to their facilities. However, this did not mean that they could not be a part of the recovery efforts. While both WPNN (AM-790) and WXBM-FM (102.7) were off the air for more than a week (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007), they still found ways to help the community. John Teelin said that WPNN (AM-790) responded to the needs of the community by using its facilities as a sort of “relief agency.” He said that after the hurricane when people started calling the station to ask where they could find water, WPNN (AM-790) General Manager Don Schroeder would take them water or invite them to come to the station to get it themselves. This was just a temporary effort however, because once the Olive Baptist Church (where Schroeder is a member) got set up as a relief center the station started to refer people there instead because it was better equipped to help (J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007).

WXBM-FM (102.7) also got involved in recovery efforts in the days before they were able to get back on the air. WXBM-FM (102.7) general manager Dave Cobb said that he left the station announcers to worry about collecting information and he organized the rest of the station employees (and even their spouses and children) to coordinate with churches to get supplies and go door to door distributing ice, water and food to people who needed it. He said that the announcers assisted these relief teams by letting them know about phone calls they received from people in need. Cobb tells a story about a house where they had to remove debris just to get up the driveway. The woman who answered the door said that her husband was disabled and they had run out of food the day before. She had not known what to do before the WXBM-FM (102.7) team showed up at her door (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007). While Cobb thought that it was important for the station to have these relief teams, he also thought it was important to get the station back on the air because he knew that while they could help dozens of people with food and water, they could help thousands of people with the information they could broadcast (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

This concentrated focus on safety and relief information continued long after the storm passed. Both WCOA's Don Parker and WUWF's John Richardson said that they basically lived and slept at their stations for over a week (D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007), while other personnel said they spent several days after the storm living at the EEOC (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

Throughout this stage, media personnel were getting out as much information as possible. WUWF's Sandra Averheart said that they had a "revolving chair" where they were constantly interviewing any official that they could to keep people updated on the state of things such as roads, utilities and the school system (personal communication, February 20, 2007). John Richardson said that WUWF (FM-88.1) spent about twenty hours a day putting on interviews and information from officials (personal communication, February 20, 2007). WCOA (AM-1370) announcer Brian Newkirk said that the Cumulus stations basically operated as a community outlet where all they did was take phone calls from their listeners and pass along information (personal communication, January 16, 2007). Even WXBM-FM (102.7), which did not get back on the air until the Tuesday after Ivan hit, was on the air soon enough to get involved with broadcasting safety and relief information.<sup>15</sup> Dave Cobb said that some of the first information they started giving out still dealt with where people could get food, clothing and shelter (personal communication, January 25, 2007).

Another type of recovery information that these stations helped the public with was the availability of fuel for their generators, vehicles and power equipment. Don Parker said a problem that the Pensacola area had in the days after Ivan was that even though many stations had gas, they didn't have the power to turn the gas pumps on and pump it (personal communication, May, 30, 2007). John Richardson said that in the week after Ivan, one of the most common questions WUWF (FM-88.1) received phone calls

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<sup>15</sup> In order to get WXBM back on the air as soon as possible, WXBM announcers actually went out to the transmitter site and originated their early broadcasts from there. (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007)

about was about where gasoline was available (personal communication, February 20, 2007). To help out this situation Dave Cobb said that WXBM-FM (102.7) had a “kind of a community gas patrol” where gas station personnel or members of the public would call up the station to let people know which stations either had fuel or were soon going to have fuel (personal communication, January 25, 2007).

While media personnel got their recovery information from a variety of sources, a very important source of information was the Escambia County Emergency Operations Center briefings. Escambia County Public Information Officer Sonya Daniel praised the Pensacola media for their coverage of the EEOC. She said that during Ivan the media “were community outreach” and that the media was the public’s link to the information that they needed. She said she worked closely with the media to make sure the EEOC briefings provided the media with the information they needed. To do this, she followed the media’s lead and let them help determine how many briefings she would have each day and at what times those briefings would be held (S. Daniel, personal communication, March 3, 2007). Daniel used the last briefing of the day as an example of the media’s commitment during Ivan. She said that briefing was usually held at 7:00 or 8:00 in the evening and she opened it up to any official that had something they wanted to say. She said that sometimes these meetings would last over two hours. She worried that this length would be hard on the media, but that the media “to their credit” continued to broadcast them (S. Daniel, personal communication, March 3, 2007).

Although different media organizations used the information from these briefings in a variety of ways, several stations such as WPNN (AM-790), WTKX-FM (101.5), WUWF (FM-88.1), and WYCL (FM-107.3) broadcast the full briefings from the Escambia County Emergency Operations Center (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007). Joel Sampson said that he decided to put the briefings on the Clear Channel stations because he thought that the public would be better served by being able to hear the officials themselves give the information rather than having Sampson pick and choose what he thought was important for them to hear. He said that he found out that these briefings gave people a good opportunity to take a break from cleaning up their neighborhoods and hear what the officials had to say (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007).

While WUWF (FM-88.1) also broadcast the full briefings, they adapted to the public needs after they received calls from people asking for the briefings to be broadcast at a specific time in the evening so that they could listen to it after they were finished clearing trees and cleaning up debris. WUWF (FM-88.1) started letting listeners know ahead of time when the briefings would be rebroadcast so that they would not have to waste their radio batteries because they did not know when the information would come back on (J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007). In addition to broadcasting the regular EEOC briefings, WUWF (FM-88.1) also carried the Spanish translation of the EEOC briefings (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20,



2007). John Teelin said that WPNN (AM-790) recorded the briefings and played them back every couple of hours because he knew that the audience was constantly changing and there would be many people listening who did not hear the earlier broadcast (personal communication, February 22, 2007).

After a few days, the media started to slowly transition back into their more normal programming schedules. Sonya Daniel said she observed that many organizations had some internal conflicts in deciding when to begin the transition back into their normal formats. She said that many of the media personnel who were stationed at the EEOC wanted to keep broadcasting information frequent from the EEOC, while their managers back at the station were under pressure to start getting commercials back on to help pay the bills (S. Daniel, personal communication, March 3, 2007).

For each organization the answer of when to start the transition was different. Sue Straughn said that about a day and a half after Ivan WEAR-TV (3) personnel started putting ABC programming back into the station's schedule. She said that they transitioned back into their normal program schedule gradually by at first cutting in with hurricane updates between the programs and then transitioning to having expanded newscasts (S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007). Bob Solarski said that the decision to go back to ABC programming was made after station personnel determined that they had broadcast all the public safety information that they needed to at that point in time (personal communication, April 19, 2007).

Most radio stations started to make the transition sometime during the first week after Ivan. Jim Sanborn said that WYCT (FM-98.7) started playing some music and making up commercials while the station was still broadcasting from the EEOC. He said that the announcers back at the station would play a couple of songs and then Sanborn would give out emergency information from the EEOC for about ten minutes before the announcer would play a couple of more songs (J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007). Brian Newkirk said that the two Cumulus FM stations went back to music formats interspersed with hurricane updates after WCOA (AM-1370) got back on the air about a week after Ivan. At this time even WCOA (AM-1370) also put on some of its normal news/talk programs with hurricane updates in the breaks (B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007). Joel Sampson said that it was about five or six days after the storm when WTKX-FM (101.5) started putting on a few songs (personal communication, March 13, 2007).

While many of the media personnel may have wanted to stay in hurricane-only mode for longer, several personnel also acknowledged that transitioning back into more normal programming did serve some important functions. Jim Sanborn said that playing a couple of songs in between updates gave the announcers a helpful break because they were busy answering phones in addition to their announcing (personal communication, April, 4, 2007). He also thought that their listeners were interested in the commercials that they aired for insurance companies because these commercial gave out important insurance information that people needed (J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007). Bob Solarski said that he thought that returning to ABC programming was

important because it starts to reestablish a sense of normalcy that people are looking for (personal communication, April 19, 2007).

Even as more and more normal programming came back on the air, the media remained in a post-hurricane mode—they just transitioned into longer term recovery efforts. Bob Solarski said that even though they had gone to normal programming after a couple of days, WEAR-TV (3) was still in hurricane mode for several months afterward. For over a month after the storm they put a ticker at the bottom of the screen that continually ran recovery information and phone numbers (B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007). Sue Straughn said another way in which they helped the community was by focusing on what volunteer organizations, such as the Red Cross, were doing and what they needed so that the public could know what they could do to help these organizations (personal communication, April 24, 2007). The *Pensacola News Journal* printed a variety of stories to help residents' recovery. Tom Ninestine said that they did things such as partnering with a local law firm to give their readers an “Insurance 101” and carrying several about how to make a variety of home repairs (personal communication, February 15, 2007).

Some recovery efforts went beyond simply relaying information to the public as organizations got directly involved with the recovery. Dave Cobb said that WXBM-FM (102.7) was able to help out with the distribution of donated items when a radio station owner from Rome, Georgia called him and asked where they could deliver a tractor trailer full of items donated by their listeners. Cobb helped him locate a place where they

could distribute these items and then alerted his listeners to it (personal communication, January 25, 2007). Similarly, WYCT (FM-98.7) held a clothing drive and handed out clothes to people who needed them (J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007).

A variety of recovery efforts continued for many months after the storm as other organizations got involved in the recovery process. In November 2004 Escambia County leaders started a nonprofit group called REBUILD Northwest Florida, Inc. to help people rebuild their homes (REBUILD Northwest Florida, 2010). According to REBUILD Northwest Florida Mitigation Specialist Salina Woodbery the local media were helpful in letting the community know about REBUILD and in assisting in the fundraising to start the program because the group was started entirely with donations. Government funds took much longer to get to REBUILD because of all the red involved (S. Woodbery, personal communication, August 28, 2009).<sup>16</sup>

While many media organizations promoted efforts such as this, for over three months after Ivan WEAR-TV (3) produced an hour long program—during which they gave up their advertising time—to promote recovery programs such as REBUILD Northwest Florida. The first half hour of this program was carried on WEAR-TV (3) while the entire hour was carried on its sister station WFGX (35) (S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007). A couple of days after Ivan local PBS station WSRE (23) started a similar effort by going on the air at 5:00 each evening for two to four hours and interviewing anyone that would come to the studios to help get out official recovery

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<sup>16</sup> While Salina Woodbery seemed to indicate that the media in general helped out in these ways, she specifically mentioned the help that WEAR-TV and WYCT provided. (personal communication, August 28, 2009)

information to the public. WSRE (23), which did not participate in storm coverage before or during Ivan, does not have a news team and was not trying to compete with the commercial stations, but they could dedicate this time to simply get information out (L. Patterson, personal communication, June 12, 2007). Director of Engineering and assistant General Manager Roland Philips said that their philosophy is that WSRE's main usefulness is providing information after the storm (personal communication, June 12, 2007). This commitment to promoting recovery efforts continued even beyond these programs. Dave Cobb said that over six months after Ivan, Marty White used his morning show to contact Florida Congressman Jeff Miller and lobby for more FEMA reimbursement (personal communication, January 25, 2007).

## Chapter 6 Summary of the Pensacola Media's Public Service Role

### *Capabilities of Media Types*

While individual members of the local Pensacola media were usually quick to emphasize the advantages of their own media and the importance of their own organizations' roles in assisting the Pensacola community during Hurricane Ivan,<sup>17</sup> this overview of the local organizations involved in the coverage illustrates that all local media organizations had something that they could contribute to the community if they got involved. For example, both John Teelin, a part-time newscaster from the small CNN affiliate WPNN (AM-790), and Marty White a morning country music announcer from WXBM-FM (102.7), worked side by side at the EEOC broadcasting information over the hurricane network. On the other hand, locally owned WYCT (FM-98.7)—which had been on the air for less than a year and was on its own because it did not have any partnerships with other media outlets—was an important part of the post Ivan coverage

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<sup>17</sup> Tom Ninestine thought that the PNJ had the advantage over radio because it had pictures and a larger staff and that it had the advantage over television because people cannot get television without power (personal communication, February 15, 2007) Don Parker and Brian Newkirk said WCOA (AM-1370) had the advantage because they were news talk and the P1 station for the area (B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007). John Teelin, Joel Sampson, and Marty White said radio had the advantage because it could be received with a battery receiver (J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007; J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007). WEAR-TV (3) personnel thought they had an advantage because they have a news/weather team and additional resources (B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; A. Strum, personal communication, February 8, 2007). WUWF (FM-88.1) and WSRE (23) personnel thought they had an advantage because their stations are noncommercial (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; L. Patterson, personal communication, June 12, 2007; R. Philips, personal communication, June 12, 2007).

because it was the only station that stay on the air throughout the entire hurricane and was one of only three stations on the air the morning after.

This study also illustrates that one medium was not more important than the others because each medium had both strengths and limitations. The local newspaper's strength was that its large, dedicated news staff could cover the disaster from a variety of angles using both stories and photographs. It was also the only medium that produced a physical information product that the public could hold in their hands and take with them. This made it a good medium to disseminate things such as lists, phone numbers, maps, etc during the preparedness and recovery stages. The physical nature of the medium also allows it to be stored and saved for future reference making it "the first draft of history" (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007). However, the physical nature of the newspaper was also a limiting factor because it required the information to go through the lengthy publishing and distribution process before it reached the public. This means that the newspaper cannot deliver quickly changing emergency information in the midst of a disaster such as a hurricane; disaster conditions may make distribution difficult or impossible (the worse the disaster, the less useful the newspaper will be); and, if distribution is possible, the newspaper may be limited primarily to subscribers who are still at their residences because other distribution sites may not be open.

The local television station also had the strength of a large, dedicated news staff to cover the disaster, but its ability to use video and broadcast live from a variety of locations allowed it to let the public know about changing conditions as they occurred—

which gave its information immediacy. The local television station also had a meteorology staff and resources which allowed it to cover the weather related disaster with more authority and tools than many of the other media. However, the complexity of the television signal also made it more challenging for the station to maintain an audience during the hurricane. The station would lose its ability to distribute its programming if its transmitter was damaged or if the community lost power. In the case of Hurricane Ivan both occurred.

A strength of the local radio stations was that the immediacy of the medium allowed radio stations to be flexible in getting out changing information quickly. Additionally, widespread availability of battery operated radio receivers made radio the best medium to get information to the community after it lost electrical power. Therefore, during the post-storm environment in which residents rely on whichever information sources that they can actually access, radio stations had an advantage as long as they could stay on the air. However, like television, radio stations were limited by broadcast technology in that they were also susceptible to losing their transmitters rendering them unable to distribute programming. Another limitation of radio was staffing in that most stations did not have a dedicated news staff and they had fewer employees than the newspaper and television stations did.

The Hurricane Ivan coverage also illustrates that the Internet can play a limited role in providing information to the community during a major disaster. The *Pensacola News Journal's* use of its website, pnj.com, throughout the storm and in its aftermath to



post pictures and stories about Hurricane Ivan's destruction was the first time that the local Pensacola media had utilized the Internet to distribute hurricane information to the community. Tom Ninestine said the Internet allowed the *News Journal* to immediately post a lot of the pictures and stories that were eventually published and distributed to residents on Saturday and Sunday. He said that coverage was helpful to people from Pensacola who had evacuated to other communities. He said that the *News Journal* received thousands of e-mails from people who appreciated the newspaper's Internet coverage, but that the lack of power and Internet service made the Internet coverage useless to residents who stayed in Pensacola (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

The limitations of the different media were seen in Pensacola residents' limited access to media after Hurricane Ivan. Following the storm the primary medium that residents could access was radio. WEAR-TV (3) was able to keep broadcasting, but because the community lost electrical power most of its audience could only receive the television signal when it was being simulcast on a radio station. The *Pensacola News Journal* was able to publish the paper and post information on the Internet during Ivan's landfall, but hazardous conditions made distribution impossible and power conditions made it difficult for residents to connect to the Internet. Radio stations also had difficulties staying on the air during the storm because of the high winds, but because of the number of radio stations on the air, at least one radio station remained on the air at all times and several were on the air the afternoon following the storm. While the other media were limited by the conditions during and after the storm, they became more

useful to Pensacola residents as conditions improved in the days following Ivan's landfall.

### *Cooperative Media Coverage Benefits the Public*

Ivan also illustrated that local media organizations can overcome some of their limitations and more effectively serve their community during disasters by working together with other media organizations. Group owned facilities did this almost automatically during Ivan. For example, the Cumulus and Clear Channel owned stations simulcast their hurricane coverage on all of their stations before, during and after the storm. This was especially helpful to them after the storm because some of the stations were off the air. They were able to use the stations that were quickly repairable to broadcast post hurricane information. Group owned stations also had more resources at their disposal to expedite repairs to their damaged facilities. Similarly, the *Pensacola News Journal* was able to use the facilities of nearby sister Gannett owned papers to publish their editions immediately after the storm.

Group owned media were not the only examples of cooperation between outlets, however. Other media organizations were also able to work together to strengthen their coverage of the hurricane. Ownership did not have to be a barrier between organizations. The hurricane network of WEAR-TV(3), WCOA (AM-1370), WJLQ (FM-100.7), WPNN (AM-790), WRRX (FM-106.1), WUWF (FM-88.1), WYCL (FM-107.3), and WXBM-FM (102.7) worked together to deliver information to the community despite the

fact that they represented five different owners, two different media types, and a variety of radio formats.

Their shared resources helped these broadcast outlets have more information and resources available to them than they would have otherwise had; and the radio partners gave WEAR-TV (3) the ability to continue broadcasting to the community throughout much of the night after the power was out and most residents were no longer able to get the television signal. Having several radio stations in the group also increased the possibility that at least one or two of them would be able to stay on the air while Ivan was making landfall.

#### *Hurricane Coverage Takes a Commitment*

While Ivan did show that all local media organizations—no matter their size or type—can be useful to their communities during a major disaster, it does take a personal and financial commitment from these organizations in order to be involved in the disaster coverage. This is especially true during a disaster such as a hurricane where there can be a lengthy preparation and response time. If an organization was involved in Hurricane Ivan coverage, many if not all of its personnel had to give up at least some of their own personal preparation time to prepare their homes and families for the storm and work during the storm separated from their families. For organizations that have news personnel, doing this was an assumed part of the job (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007; B. Solariski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; S. Straughn, personal

communication, April 24, 2007; A. Strum, personal communication, February 8, 200), but it cannot be expected that personnel at all organizations would have the same level of dedication to work during the storm.

Hurricane Ivan coverage also required a financial commitment, especially from the broadcast media. The *Pensacola News Journal* was able to publish normal sized papers during the hurricane (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007), but many of the broadcast media gave up air time they normally reserve for commercials so that they could be involved in full-time Hurricane coverage—and for them time was money. Most of the broadcasters who were involved in the hurricane coverage went to wall-to-wall coverage for at least 24 hours during the hurricane and some went longer (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; B. Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007; B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007). During much of this coverage, commercials—and therefore revenue—were eliminated or reduced. Beyond this wall-to-wall coverage commercials were gradually phased back in over a couple of days, but there were examples of longer term commitments such as WEAR-TV (3) giving up commercial slots in an hour long Rebuild Northwest Florida program every night for several months (S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007). Since each media organization engaged in different amounts of coverage for different lengths of time, there is no reliable way to quantify the amount of revenue the stations gave up during their

hurricane Ivan coverage, but it is clear that they did experience some amount of financial loss because of their commitment to hurricane coverage during Ivan.

*Public Service Goes Beyond Providing Information*

The Pensacola media's experience during Hurricane Ivan also illustrates the ability of the local media to go beyond their informational roles to directly help in the recovery of their community after a major disaster. After Ivan, media organizations creatively used their resources to serve the needs of their community. Even though WXBM-FM (102.7) and WPNN (AM-790) were off the air for several days after the hurricane, they were able to assist in the recovery by using their resources to distribute food, water, and ice to residents who needed it. Another example of a creative use of resources to help the community was when a *Pensacola News Journal* reporter from the Milton office loaned his satellite phone to the local police and fire chiefs so that they could call the state capital and communicate with the state officials there (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

Media organizations also assisted in longer term recovery with WYCT (FM-98.7) initiating clothing drives for those in need (J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007), WXBM-FM (102.7) calling a congressman on air to lobby for funds for the community (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007), and the *Pensacola News Journal* using the Gannett foundation to help out some charities (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

## Chapter 7 Conclusion and Recommendations

During times of disaster, the local media have a special opportunity to help their communities. Escambia County Public Information Officer Sonya Daniel said that even though there were many national and regional media outlets on site during Hurricane Ivan, the local media were her priorities because she knew that they would still be around long-term after the storm was over and the out-of-town media had left (personal communication, March 3, 2007). In other words, the local media were important because they were the organizations that would provide the most help to the local residents during Ivan and will still be around to help residents during the next storm. Daniel praised the local media's coverage of Hurricane Ivan and said that during Ivan the local media was "community outreach. They were there for the community. They were their (the community's) link to what was open, what was closed, what to do, when to do it, how to do it" (S. Daniel, personal communication, March 3, 2007). However, there were also opportunities for the media to improve their disaster coverage.

### *Lessons Learned Through Hurricane Ivan*

Many Pensacola media organizations used what they learned from the Hurricane Ivan experience to better prepare themselves for future storms. For some organizations, Ivan revealed the need for them to adjust their hurricane procedures. WXBM-FM (102.7) general manager Dave Cobb said that WXBM's policies for the storm coverage worked well and that 90% to 95% of the station's storm coverage was according to established station policy, but that the station lacked a policy on what to do during the recovery stage.

He said that after Ivan he established new policies for dealing with hurricane recovery. As a part of the new recovery policies, the station purchased a commercial ice machine and put it on a generator so that employees can more quickly get ice to residents after future storms (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

WTKX-FM (101.5) program director Joel Sampson said that he learned the importance of having and sticking to an announcing schedule during storms. He said that during hurricanes announcers like to keep going without stopping, but during an event like Ivan they needed to be prevented from burning out because of how long the station remained in disaster mode. He said that now he has a regimented hurricane schedule for announcers where they are only allowed on the air for four hours. After that point he will get them out of the studio and make them get some rest (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007). Sampson also said that in the year after Ivan (and in part because of lessons learned during Hurricane Katrina) Clear Channel developed comprehensive plans to bring in out-of-town announcers who are familiar with hurricanes to help relieve the local announcers and give them a break (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007). WPNN (AM-790) news director John Teelin also noted the need for breaks during the long hours required for major hurricane coverage. However, since he did not have access to the resources of a large organization such as Clear Channel, he said that during the next hurricane he hopes to get some volunteers that can help out at the station and provide him with some relief (J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 200).

In addition to adjusting hurricane policies, media organizations also focused on improving equipment that failed during Ivan. John Teelin said that before Ivan he thought WPNN (AM-790) was ready to withstand the storm because it was fully generated, but then the station went off the air after its tower blew over. Equipment problems continued after the storm, when the station's generator caused problems with its electronic equipment (J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007). To compensate for these problems in the future, WPNN (AM-790) installed a stronger tower and rewired the building to better accommodate the use of generators (J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007).

Dave Cobb, general manager of WXBW-FM (102.7), said that Ivan was the “single biggest lesson on technology” that he had in all his years of broadcasting (personal communication, January 25, 2007). After the storm he focused on having additional redundancies in the station's information flow. Before the storm WXBW-FM (102.7) had two options to relay information back from the EEOC—phone lines and a microwave link, but after both of those failed during Ivan the station added a satellite phone as a third layer of redundancy to increase reliability during future storms. Cobb also said that WXBW-FM (102.7) now has five different ways to get its signal on the air. Before Ivan it only had one primary and one backup method (D. Cobb, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

Similarly, Joel Sampson said that the Clear Channel stations also learned the importance of having a backup system to relay the signal to their towers. After Ivan they



added a fiber backup to their microwave systems (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007). Additionally, as a result of all of the hurricanes that hit the gulf Coast in 2004 and 2005, Clear Channel worked out the details to evacuate announcers to a Clear Channel station in another city and use satellites to broadcast emergency information back into their community (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007). Even the *Pensacola News Journal*, which was able to keep publishing the paper throughout Ivan, realized how precarious their location was during a hurricane of Ivan's severity and arranged to have a more equipped second location at WSRE (23) to evacuate to (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007; R. Philips, personal communication, June 12, 2007).

The many mass communications systems that failed during Ivan illustrated the importance of having cooperative partnerships among media organizations to help them maintain a reliable flow of information during disasters. Organizations that had partnerships during Ivan were pleased with the way they worked and wanted to continue or enhance those partnerships for future storms (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007), but organizations that did not have partnerships during Ivan focused on developing new partnerships for future storms (R. Philips, personal communication, June 12, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007). After Hurricane Ivan, WYCT (FM-98.7), which had no partners during Ivan, formed a new relationship with the *Pensacola News Journal* to regularly receive news information from the paper. During future storms this arrangement gives WYCT

(FM-98.7) the ability to have an employee stationed at the *News Journal* facilities to provide the station with additional hurricane information (S. Daniel, personal communication, March 3, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007).

WSRE (23), another organization that did not have partners during Ivan, focused on better serving the community by making its facilities available to support local news organizations. It made an arrangement with WEAR-TV (3) to provide it with a backup location in case a storm renders WEAR-TV's studios unusable (R. Philips, personal communication, June 12, 2007). It also made arrangements with the *Pensacola News Journal* to provide it with a backup publishing location in case the *News Journal's* downtown facilities become too flooded to publish the paper (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007; R. Philips, personal communication, June 12, 2007). Additionally, the *Pensacola News Journal* sought to expand its partnerships beyond local media organizations by talking with XM Satellite Radio about supplying information to XM channel 247 during hurricanes (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

After Ivan, some media organizations also focused on improving the information they provided to the community. Getting information from the nearby Santa Rosa County Emergency Operations Center was something media organizations had difficulty doing during Ivan, but was something that they worked to correct after Ivan. (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; M. White,

personal communication, January 25, 2007). Sandra Averheart said that WUWF (FM-88.1) had talked with Santa Rosa County about carrying the Santa Rosa Emergency Operations center briefings on the air (personal communication, February 20, 2007). Averheart also said that since Ivan, WUWF (FM-88.1) has talked about improving its coverage by having trusted listeners from different parts of the county be weather spotters for the station. This would enable WUWF (FM-88.1) to provide a listener perspective on what is going on around the county without opening up their airwaves to the general public (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007). The *Pensacola News Journal* did not wait for another hurricane to hit before it changed the information it gave to the public. Metro Editor Tom Ninestine said that after a post-Ivan task force found that information was the key to helping residents prepare for a hurricane, the paper started distributing more detailed hurricane guides at the beginning of hurricane season (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

#### *Hurricane Network Could Be More Efficient*

While the hurricane network helped the participating organizations to provide better coverage of Hurricane Ivan, it could be further refined to more efficiently use the combined resources. During Hurricane Ivan, the storm network stations independently decided how they would use the network based on their individual needs. For example, WPNN (AM-790) basically simulcast WEAR-TV's coverage while stations such as WCOA (AM-1370) and WUWF (FM-88.1) basically just used the television broadcast for periodical updates (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; B.

Newkirk, personal communication, January 16, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007). This worked well while Ivan was approaching Pensacola; however, once the stations started going off the air they could have adjusted how the network worked to better use the resources that were still functioning.

For example, WEAR-TV's personnel were on the air throughout the night and into the next morning. By Thursday afternoon they were worn out and the station had to start transitioning back into ABC programming even though they would have liked to have kept in the hurricane mode longer (S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007). A more efficient use of network resources might have allowed them to stay in hurricane longer.

After the community lost power, WEAR-TV (3) basically became a radio station as it relied on its radio partners to distribute its signal. During this time in the early morning hours, it could have been more flexible in its programming by scaling back its broadcast to that of a supporting role of the radio stations by having its meteorological staff provide periodical hurricane updates to the radio stations.

Additionally, at some point during the night all of the hurricane network radio stations had all gone off the air effectively blacking out the network for a few hours during the height of the storm. While the radio station personnel got some sleep when their stations went off the air, the WEAR-TV (3) personnel continued to broadcast even

though nobody was listening. If they had worked with the radio stations to stay updated on the current state of network resources, they could have responded to the changing conditions and conserved the station news personnel until the next day when their radio partners came back on the air and they had an audience again.

Of course this solution would not work in during less intense hurricanes or other disasters in which the public does not lose power and stations stay on the air, but it does underscore the importance of the media organizations remaining flexible during disasters and alter their coverage and methods to maintain efficient information distribution in the face of changing conditions. This is especially important in major disasters such as Ivan. However, it also would require media personnel to set their egos aside since many personnel take pride in the length of time that they stayed on the air during wall-to-wall coverage (J. Sampson, personal communication, March 13, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007; B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

#### *Local Officials Need to Work with the Media*

Emergency communications do not only hinge on the preparations of the local media organizations, but also on the preparations of local emergency officials who need to use the media to deliver emergency and disaster information to the public. They must be prepared to efficiently get emergency information to the media. It was important for the media to be located at the Escambia Emergency Operations Center during the

hurricane and in the immediate aftermath because the emergency officials do not have time to be answering phone calls from all the media in order to get the information out (M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007). Nearby Santa Rosa County, which is located just across Escambia Bay from Pensacola, did not have this philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Santa Rosa County officials did not allow the media into their Emergency Operations Center because they did not think they had enough space and they had a difficult time getting their information out to the media. This resulted in the media having a hard time getting specific information about Santa Rosa County for several days (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007).

Local officials need to understand that the local media is their link to the public and have plans to do everything possible to make sure they are able to get all the information they need. For example even though the EEOC allowed media to be there, in the midst of the destruction after the storm the media needed to be able to get information from there. Joel Sampson, who did not have a way to contact the EEOC, was able to make the connection with the EEOC by getting a friend from the Sheriff's office to take one of his station employees there. Before disasters officials could make arrangements with the media to do similar things so the media do not have to rely on inside friendships to get emergency information out.

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<sup>18</sup>Santa Rosa County was further isolated from Escambia County because Hurricane Ivan destroyed the two bridges over Escambia Bay making travel between cities in the two counties very difficult. (Moon, 2004)

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

This case study approach is able to provide a snapshot of the local Pensacola media's involvement in the community during a major disaster. As such it can be instructive to media organizations or researchers as to the different roles that the local media can play during similar disaster situations but there a lot of questions that it cannot answer. Since communication during disasters is so important, there needs to be continued research to better understand this area.

While members of the Pensacola media mentioned anecdotal evidence that the information that they provided during Hurricane Ivan was helpful and important to the community (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; S. Daniel, personal communication, March 3, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007; B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007), a Usage and Gratifications study on the public's consumption of local media during a major disaster is necessary to verify what media and messages the public actually relies on. For example, a common assumption from the Pensacola media personnel was that after the public lost power, they turned to radio for information during landfall (S. Averheart, personal communication, February 20, 2007; T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007; D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007; B. Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25,

2007), but while this seems logical a Usage and Gratifications study is necessary to verify whether or not there was much of an audience during the overnight hours anyway and what types of information they were wanting.

Additionally, a Usage and Gratifications study could also indicate if a major disaster such as Hurricane Ivan causes residents to rely more heavily on the local media organizations for information, and if an organization's proximity to the disaster area impacts how residents consume that organization's information. In the case of Hurricane Ivan a study such as this could look into whether or not Pensacola residents actually preferred Pensacola based broadcast stations to Mobile based broadcast stations during the time that all of them were still on the air. It could also see if any changes in media consumption that occurred during the disaster continued after the disaster was over. For example, if residents relied more heavily on local media during a disaster this study could then see if these residents continued to have a loyalty to the local media after the disaster situation had passed.

A common practice of many Pensacola broadcast organizations during Hurricane Ivan was the broadcasting of phone calls that they received from the public. While both WPNN's John Teelin and WUWF's John Richardson were wary of the practice (J. Richardson, personal communication, February 20, 2007; J. Teelin, personal communication, February 22, 2007), many other personnel embraced the practice as a legitimate way of providing information to the public (D. Parker, personal communication, May, 30, 2007; J. Sanborn, personal communication, April, 4, 2007; B.



Solarski, personal communication, April 19, 2007; S. Straughn, personal communication, April 24, 2007; M. White, personal communication, January 25, 2007). A content analysis of this type of programming would be helpful to determine if it leads to a higher percentage of incorrect information being broadcast compared to normal disaster programming. Additionally, a Usage and Gratifications study of this content would also be helpful to determine whether or not the public actually receives useful information from this programming or if it is just simply an easy way for stations to fill air time.

Another area for future study is researching differences between different types of communities in the ability of the local media to be involved in public service during disasters. For example, the Pensacola market has several media organizations that are staffed with local people who live in the Pensacola community and the media organizations included in this case study demonstrated commitments to serving the public interest of their community. It would be interesting to see how this experience compares to that of a more rural community that has much of its “local media” originate in other more distant communities. Would those organizations that truck newspapers into a community or use translator stations to reach a community show the same level of commitment to the public interest of the community impacted by the disaster?

Finally, communications technology has continued to change since Hurricane Ivan and future studies need to account for that. During Ivan the *Pensacola News Journal* discovered that the Internet was a useful tool to reaching people who had evacuated from the Pensacola area, but that it was not useful to those who stayed in Pensacola because of

the destruction to the infrastructure (T. Ninestine, personal communication, February 15, 2007). Future studies should see if the expanded use of data plans on smart phones and similar devices has made the Internet more useful to those who are in the impact zone of a major disaster such as Ivan. If enough cell phone towers withstand the disaster, the local media may be able to count on the Internet to reach a portion of their community through these newer technologies.

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## Appendix A

## Gulf Power's Post-Ivan Power Restoration Progress

Date	Power Situation
September 16	Hurricane Ivan knocked out power to 90% of Gulf Power customers in eight counties. In Escambia County 137,963 customers were without power.
September 17	Crews restored the Plant Crist generating plant and 20 substations.
September 18	Crews restored power to Pensacola hospitals and the sewer system.
September 19	A total of 10,326 Escambia County customers had power restored.
September 20	A total of 38,159 Escambia County customers had power restored.
September 21	A total of 48,328 Escambia County customers had power restored.
September 22	A total of 58,005 Escambia County customers had power restored.
September 23	Approximately 69,963 Escambia County customers had power restored.
September 24	Approximately 74,963 Escambia County customers had power restored.
September 25	Approximately 79,963 Escambia County customers had power restored.
September 26	A total of 91, 422 Escambia County customers had power restored.
September 27	Approximately 99,963 Escambia County customers had power restored.

## Gulf Power's Post-Ivan Power Restoration Progress (Continued)

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Date	Power Situation
September 28	Over 131,065 Escambia County customers had power restored.
September 29	All Escambia County customers who could receive power had power restored.

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Source: Gulf Power Press Releases.