

## Preparedness a priority as hurricane season nears

By Patrick Fuller

While most of us are still recovering from the impacts of Hurricane Ian, the start of the 2023 Atlantic hurricane season still awaits us on June 1. The resolve, resiliency and determination exhibited by our residents since the storm struck has been nothing short of awe-inspiring. While we all repair and rebuild our community in a way that makes us more capable of weathering the next storm, we need to keep in mind the next storm could happen in any given year.

Charlotte County has received direct impacts from two Category 4 storms within the first quarter of this century and although we would like to believe that means it's not our turn, that is not how storms work. Seasonal predictions provide nothing more than an estimate on the expected number of storms and intensity based on meteorological factors. Those prediction don't and cannot tell you what community will be impacted. It is important to keep those facts in mind as we near this hurricane season. It is important to treat every year the same and to prepare as if we will be encountering a tropical storm or hurricane.

For the most part, individual and household preparedness looks the same in any given year. Our residents know circumstances do change, especially after suffering the impacts of a major storm. Please ensure you are dusting off your disaster plan and take into account experiences from Ian. Know where you will go when directed to evacuate, what you will be bringing with you and how you will communicate with loved ones. Take advantage of the two sales tax holidays — May 27-June 9 and Aug. 26-Sept. 8 — to restock your disaster supply kits in advance of hurricane season.

Disaster planning and preparedness should be as regular as doing your taxes and changing your oil for all Floridians. A great start would be to grab a copy of our Charlotte County Disaster Guide at one of our libraries. Disaster Guides are also available on the Emergency Management website. Visit [www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/disasterguide](http://www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/disasterguide).

Anyone living in Southwest Florida on Sept. 28, 2022 experienced impacts from Ian. Most of us will use that storm as a benchmark for how bad a storm can be, though we have to remember each storm is different. The threats of extreme wind, rainfall and storm surge are not uniform among storms. Charlotte County was pounded with Category 4 winds and flooding rainfall for several hours, but we were spared the catastrophic storm surge seen to our south in Lee and Collier counties. A slight shift to the north could have brought that surge to our community.

Those who were living here in 2004 know Hurricane Charley was an entirely different Category 4 storm than Ian. It is important to remember every storm has unique features and threats and not base your decisions for future storms on past experiences.

The amazing strides this community has made in the months since Ian are evident to anyone who witnessed its impacts. It is vitally important to prepare just in case we are visited again this year.

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