

## GIS Investment Pays Off for St. Lucie County

St. Lucie County, Florida



Beautiful St. Lucie County's tourism slogan is "Still Unspoiled, Still Uncrowded," but last September something like "All Hands on Deck" might have been more descriptive. Three major hurricanes in three weeks left the county with an estimated \$116 million in damage; an avalanche of people from around the country arrived to help. Coordinating the efforts of those people became a monumental job in itself and county officials were happy to discover the GIS technology they'd put into place several years earlier would play a key role in the process.

"We had about 10 years worth of work to do in six months," said county GIS Coordinator, Ed Blaine. "It's hard to imagine a larger scale recovery effort than what we had to face last fall. GIS was incredibly useful. I was glad we had the system in place and that our database was as advanced as it is. The time and money we invested in GIS definitely paid off when we needed it the most."

St. Lucie County contracted with Geographic Technologies Group for a comprehensive GPS centerline and address data collection project, and is installing LGdispatch. GTG also trained county employees in the use of ArcGIS, an integrated collection of GIS software.



"The days after the hurricanes were sheer chaos down here," Blaine said. "We were responsible for providing tech support for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who brought construction crews to do emergency repairs for people with serious roof damage."

"We divided the county into zones, which helped organize work assignments geographically, and set up a kiosk so the contractors could check addresses and locations themselves. And, of course we provided the network and the connectivity to make it work," Blaine said. While emergency repairs were underway, FEMA arrived with a fleet of trailers for temporary housing.

"We developed an application our Community Services Department used to get people emergency shelter. We helped them set up a phone bank where they could take information and triage the requests for FEMA. It was based on GIS technology and worked really well," Blaine said. "We still have 1,600 to 1,800 people living in FEMA trailers because there just aren't enough contractors to repair all of the severe structural damage the storms did."

Another pressing concern for the county was massive debris removal. "We contracted with dozens of vendors to help pick up the debris, and it had to be done quickly because the last thing we wanted was for the tree limbs and other trash to become missiles when the next hurricane hit. Again, coordination was key. We divided the County into zones, assigned contracts to specific areas and also designated free pickup zones where people could take their debris. It went very smoothly," he said. Today, things are getting back to normal in St. Lucie County and the GIS Department is making plans to add new services.

"Our immediate priority is to extend access to GIS data to the public," Blaine said. "We're talking about using GTG's MapTouch in pilot kiosks in the Growth Management Department. The demand is huge and this is a top priority for me right now. The planning manager desperately wants those kiosks up and running and we're already speculating that two might not be enough. We know they'll be well received." Blaine said. Adding to the sense of urgency is the fact that the map books currently being used are no longer being updated. "We have to get current information out there immediately. I know the citizens will love using GIS technology. Everyone does."

Blaine is currently finishing an internal GIS survey to help set priorities for the coming years. "We're refocusing our efforts and want to get input from all departments as we make our plans. We are just getting back to some projects, like updating our centerline and address point layers, after the hurricane delays. Everyone is ready to move forward." IT Analyst Reuben Dye is concentrating on getting LGdispatch up and running.

"We've resolved the technical issues and conducted the training, so we're getting close to launching the program. I've gotten great feedback and I think we're all eager to get started. This will make a big difference in how we operate," Dye said.



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