

# Emergencies bring out the best in NARA staff

The flooding and resulting electrical outages that forced us to close Archives I for nearly four weeks and the 18,000 boxes of wet records at our Suitland facility are both extremely serious matters for the National Archives. Significant funding and staff work will be required to recover from these events in the coming months, even as we enter a period of budget austerity affecting almost all Federal agencies.

There is, however, a positive side to all this. Both incidents brought out the best in NARA staff and contractors. There were staff members at Archives I in the middle of the night when water was still on the floor and others who came in only hours later to deal with the records themselves or to begin repairing the damage. And staff far from the action took on extra work to expedite the daily business of the National Archives.

The Archives I building closure had a wide impact. Many Archives I staff relocated to Archives II or worked at home, but many were at a disadvantage because they had no access to their files or computers.

However, we did not allow adversity to interfere with the Archives' annual 4th of July observance, which proceeded on schedule. Activities normally held inside Archives I were moved to the Pennsylvania Avenue plaza, under tents provided by the Foundation for the National Archives. Facsimiles of the Charters of Freedom substituted for the originals, and the Archives Shop displayed some items for sale in the tent.

The space limitation in this column prevents me from naming every individual who contributed to the recovery efforts—there were so many—but I'd like to single out just a few here from the front lines as examples of the kind of dedication and hard work on display when we confront an agency crisis.

As the heavy rains continued to fall on Washington on Sunday evening, June 25, **Tim Edwards** (NAFF), the Archives I facility manager, got a call at home in Arlington from security staff at Archives I informing him that "some flooding" was occurring in the building.

Even though water was rushing into his own basement, Tim battled flooded streets and roadblocks to get to the building, where he quickly assessed the damage and began working the phones alerting staff in NA



as well as other senior staff.

By 6 a.m., Tim had some contractors on site pumping out the flooded areas. Archives I was all pumped out before other Federal buildings had a pump on site. Several of

the contractors who were contacted said NARA was lucky to get them first because they were besieged the next day with calls from other Federal agencies.

Other individuals from the Facilities staff played key roles over the next several days, working around the clock to limit the damage and begin repairs—often without lights and air conditioning. Overseeing it all was **Mark Sprouse**. **John Bartell**, Facilities branch chief, directed recovery operations and set initial priorities. **Ngan Pham**, our electrical engineer, worked with PEPCO to get electrical power back to the building.

Other Facilities staff who worked the control center 24/7 and oversaw contractor functions were **Mark Eubanks**, **Richard (Chip) Sandage**, **Mary Liggins**, **Ron Shivers**, **Bob Menoche**, **Darrell Price**, **Lawrence (Melvin) Holley**, and **Linda Earl**. **Ann Harrison** and **LaVerne Fields** of NAA helped to prepare emergency contracts for pumping and dehumidification.

As if we hadn't had enough water damage, at the Washington National Records Center (WNRC) in Suitland, on Sunday afternoon, July 2, an eight-inch water main burst inside Stack 6. As the water spilled from the broken pipe, it reached a level of four to five inches deep in all areas of the stack. As a result, some 18,000 Federal Records Center (FRC) boxes stood in water.

Alerted by officials monitoring the alarms that there was a "fire at the WNRC," **Michael Whitted** rushed to Suitland, with **Alan Kramer**, WNRC director, arriving soon thereafter. There was no fire, so Whitted had the water on the sprinkler system turned off. Kramer notified NARA senior staff, and Whitted and **Delander Reid** began to sweep water from the floors of Stack 6. **Ann Baker**

arranged freezer trucks for Monday morning, when **Judith Barnes** recorded key data from boxes before they were frozen and shipped to the records recovery contractor's facility. Since the sprinkler system was deactivated, WNRC staff had to personally monitor Stack 6 around the clock until the sprinklers were working again.

Bringing their expertise, 25 Preservation staff members participated, as did a number of other NARA staff from Archives I and Archives II throughout the week. The last wet boxes were removed late in the afternoon of July 7.

For the record, I am pleased to report that at Archives I, no records received any damage from water or from the temperature and humidity fluctuations. At WNRC, all of the wet records have been removed and freeze-dried at our records recovery contractor's facility.

At a time when NARA faces a challenging immediate fiscal future, it is encouraging—even inspiring—to see such dedication on the part of staff members who must bear the burden of reduced resources. I am proud to serve with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allen Weinstein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ALLEN WEINSTEIN  
Archivist of the United States

*This column originally appeared  
in the July/August 2006 issue  
of the NARA Staff Bulletin.*