

There is a lot to be thankful for this week

There isn't enough space on this page to thank all of those who helped Camden County cope with and recover from the effects of Hurricane Matthew.

We may have been a little bruised and battered from the storm, but we are also thankful and humbled by the tremendous outpouring of humanitarian care and concern shown for our people.

The random acts of kindness performed by so many over the last week, some public knowledge and some not, are enough to remind us why we live in a community like this one.

Some of you will complain that things did not go off perfectly as the storm was headed our way or perhaps others may not be satisfied with how services were restored after the storm passed. However, there is no play-book for how to handle an act of God.

All storms are different. All communities are different. Planning is always important and ongoing here, but all the planning in the world does not guarantee that challenges will not occur during the middle of the disaster. That's just life, and we think our local agencies did a great job keeping us safe in spite of the challenges.

We hope that if another hurricane threatens Camden County that people again will follow evacuation orders and get to safe ground. We got lucky this time, but that does not mean we are immune to hurricanes or that evacuating is a waste of time.

A few miles difference in the track of the storm and you might have been reading a very different story in the Tribune & Georgian this week. Let's all be glad we are not.

By all accounts, Camden County's public safety and public works employees put forth a noteworthy effort, tirelessly working around the clock while their own families were evacuated or dealing with storm damage.

Our citizens, our nonprofit organizations, our churches and our businesses helped fill in all the cracks where public services did not reach. They served meals, encouraged workers and looked for opportunities to help be a blessing to others.

This is what community is all about — overcoming challenges and celebrating our victories together.

Tribune & Georgian

P.O. Box 6960 — 206 Osborne Street
St. Marys, Georgia 31558
(912) 882-4927 — Fax (912) 882-6519
Publication Number (086-640)
ISSN Number (1551-8353)

OUR MISSION

The Tribune & Georgian is published with pride weekly for the people of Camden County by Community Newspapers Inc., Athens, Ga. We believe that strong newspapers build strong communities — "Newspapers get things done!" Our primary goal is to publish distinguished and profitable community-oriented newspapers. This mission will be accomplished through the teamwork of professionals dedicated to truth, integrity, loyalty, quality and hard work.

Jill Helton, Editor and Publisher
Christy Braswell, Marketing Director
Foy R. Maloy Jr., Regional Publisher

Tom Wood
Chairman/CNI

Dink NeSmith
President/CNI

Printed on recycled paper using soy-based ink.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thanks to those who responded

Dear Editor,
Hurricane Matthew was a collective community experience, but it was also a very individual experience. Each family, each person, saw Hurricane Matthew from a different point of view.

When my husband, Keith, and I evacuated with our daughter, Mary, and our cat, Peanut Butter, we were grateful to see convoys of National Guards heading toward the storm as we left it behind.

Two things happened during this experience that troubled me greatly. One was listening to a radio announcer as we evacuated. Mary was well aware that her brother, Chris, was staying behind. When the radio announcer declared, "If you stay, you will die," I seriously wanted to punch him in the mouth.

I am not, by nature, a violent person. However, in that moment the mama bear in me bared her claws. Fortunately, Mary was so engrossed in watching "The Little Mermaid" that she missed the ominous announcement.

The second thing that troubled me was on Facebook. Councilman Grayson Day from Kingsland and state Rep. Jason Spencer did what they could to keep their Facebook followers informed about the happenings in Camden County as they related to Hurricane Matthew. Some of the responses to their posts showed ignorance of and disregard for emergency protocol and technical issues.

In addition, some used language inappropriate for public consumption. I understand that we were all



"No, we've never met the folks affected by the hurricane, but whoever they are, they're family!"

under a lot of stress but I really wish people would express themselves like adults and keep public Facebook posts curse word free.

Above all else, I would like to thank the first responders, Georgia Power, and the phone and cable companies for their diligent work in restoring services.

Trisa Chancey
St. Marys

Williams works for the best of all residents, city

Dear Editor,

I am writing to wholeheartedly endorse the re-election of Linda Williams to the city council of St. Marys.

For the past three years, I have had the honor and privilege to sit beside Linda at council meetings and to work with her for progress for our city. Linda is very intelligent, experienced and innovative. She is absolutely devoted to St. Marys, its

progress and its bright future for all citizens.

Linda knows for whom she is working: no personal agendas, no special interest groups, no bending to pressure or friendships. She listens, studies all sides of an issue and then decides solely on the basis of what she finds to be best for the City of St. Marys and all.

During our service together, Linda has provided leadership with respect to the council's vote on rezoning the mill site, for development of a discovery center for the study of marsh life, for studying whether St. Marys' waters could be suitable for a commercial oyster nursery, for improving St. Marys' flood protection ratings, for helping to develop tourism opportunities and in innumerable other respects.

Linda knows and respects the value to our city of a positive working relationship among council members, of how to disagree when necessary without being disagreeable. Linda possesses qualities essential to the

continued development of our community for all of its residents.

For these and many more reasons, I encourage all registered voters to vote on Nov. 8 and to vote for Linda Williams for St. Marys City Council.

Sam Colville
St. Marys

Voting in elections affects the future

Dear Editor,

Whether you will vote via an absentee ballot or plan to vote early between Oct. 17 and Nov. 4 (including Saturday, Oct. 29) or plan to vote on Election Day (Tuesday, Nov. 8), I think it is highly probable that you have decided which candidates and amendments will receive your vote.

For those who are frustrated with the options and are considering not to vote, please reconsider. I respectfully suggest that in our

See **LETTERS**, page 5A

Rising to the challenge in Camden

Thanks to excellent advance preparation, dedicated and experienced employees and the unwavering spirit of cooperation by residents and local businesses, St. Marys is weathering the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew well.

Although the hurricane was downgraded to Category 3 by the time it reached St. Marys, our city and county and all communities along coastal Georgia took the appropriate step of issuing a mandatory evacuation notice. Risking lives was not an option given the threat of 120 mph winds and a 6- to 9-foot storm surge.

Many St. Marys citizens did evacuate making it easier for city emergency crews to jump into action immediately following Matthew's departure. Those evacuations also meant that St. Marys water and sewer service was able to stay intact with an assist from backup generators staged to manage demand during the storm.

Georgia Power crews were able to access downed power lines and restore power for most citizens and businesses within 24 hours. This was possible with the aid of city public works employees and 60 National Guard members from Valdosta and Douglas who responded to our request for help in clearing streets and right of ways from fallen trees and debris.

Georgia Department of Transportation engineers responded, inspecting and reopening several of our



John Morrissey

Guest columnist

bridges, assuring they were not compromised and were safe for traffic.

As always, our police and fire departments were stand-outs, providing around the clock service protecting people and property and keeping our multiple discipline teams free to accomplish their tasks.

Most hurricane management is a behind the scenes operation and we cooperated fully with county and state officials at every stage of preparation and recovery. However, there are some actions that are delegated to municipalities and our staff continues to excel in those areas. We were one of the first cities in Georgia to effectively complete our official Georgia Emergency Management Agency and Federal Emergency Management Agency assessment requests, meaning we should get early consideration of our requests for federal and state financial assistance.

At this writing we are still assessing our storm damage

estimates and will continue to update those reports, but we will exceed the \$500,000 mark. Remember that it has been less than a week since recovery actions began and the full financial impact is not yet known.

As with any natural disaster, some of our citizens fared better than others. We also lost many live oak trees that have long been the symbol of our historic community.

As expected, there was flooding in low lying areas as a result of significant rain and storm surge with homes and businesses on the waterfront and marshes experiencing the greatest impact. Our St. Marys Street and Osborne Street merchants and hotels are already starting to open.

As a barrier island, Cumberland was especially vulnerable. While park rangers have completed initial assessments of damage, specifics will not be known until the national park engineering team is able to inspect docks and other structures. With so many national parks affected by Matthew, Cumberland is not the only park seeking their assistance.

Not all of our plans worked perfectly, but I would give us a very positive grade for being prepared and managing the aftermath. City officials and staff have already started debriefing and are reworking plans necessary to ensure an even higher quality response should there ever be another disaster.

While we have not had a direct hit in almost two decades, we were ready and took the threat seriously. We are taking the recovery just as seriously.

The resiliency of our community is being tested, but we will prevail. Homes will be repaired, businesses will be re-opened and visitors will return. It will take time to get back to normal, but given the devastation some of our neighboring communities are experiencing, we are fortunate. Some may say lucky. I would say that it was not just luck.

Our team worked hard to make sure we were prepared to deliver when necessary. Our citizens responded by evacuating when ordered to do so and reaching out to help their neighbors when they returned. A testament to the neighborly connections in St. Marys.

Yes, this has been a difficult week but it brought out the best in St. Marys and I could not be prouder of our staff, our officials and our citizens. We stood together. We cooperated. We collaborated. And we cared. We all did our part. Recovery is not yet complete, but we are well on our way.

My personal thanks to everyone who helped or is still helping to bring St. Marys back to normal operations.

Well done, everyone.

John Morrissey is the mayor of St. Marys. He can be contacted at john.morrissey@stmarysga.gov or (912) 510-4041.