

Hurricane Rita Was No Match for These Eagle Scouts

By Mark Ray

Somebody once asked Scouting founder Robert Baden-Powell what exactly Scouts should be prepared for. B-P replied:

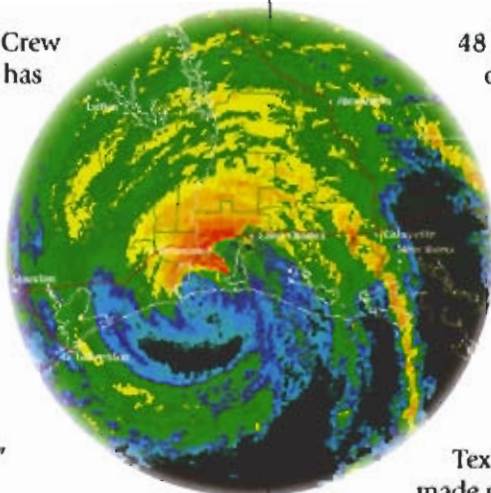
"Why, any old thing!"



When Hurricane Rita threatened the Gulf Coast in September 2005, residents of southeast Texas quickly evacuated to parts inland—and some became stranded in the mass exodus. Because being prepared is their specialty, Eagle Scouts from The Woodlands, Texas, were on hand to take some of the burden off Mother Nature's wrath.



For nearly a decade, Venturing Crew 911 in The Woodlands, Texas, has embodied B-P's words. Crew members—many of them Eagle Scouts—have taught first aid and CPR to thousands of younger Scouts. They've also pursued advanced training themselves, including such American Red Cross courses as Emergency Response, Oxygen Administration, and CPR for the Professional Rescuer. "We have literally trained 15-year-olds to be first responders," said Advisor Jay Walker.



48 hours that an emergency shelter is open. Twice when flooding affected the area, the local American Red Cross branch (whose training team sponsors Crew 911) has called on the crew to run the kitchen at its shelter at McCullough Junior High School.

Then came Hurricane Rita.

As the hurricane approached the Texas coast last September, the Red Cross made plans to open its primary shelters farther inland, along the corridor between Huntsville, Texas, and Dallas. But millions of coastal residents, mindful of the recent devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, evacuated ahead of Rita, clogging every highway in the region. Suddenly, the McCullough shelter became very important. "We would be the logical place that people would run out of gas," Walker said.

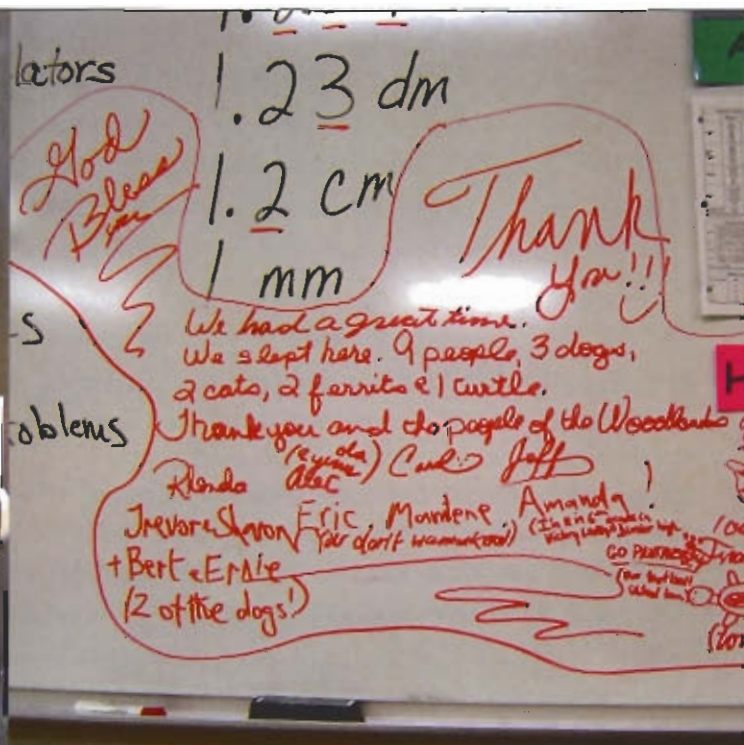
At the same time, Crew 911 doesn't ignore basic Scout training. "The crew actually encourages Scouts to go get their Eagle in the troop before chasing any awards at the crew level," said Crew Vice President (and Eagle Scout) Chris McKelvey, a junior at The Woodlands College Park High School. "Everyone recognizes the impact of that Eagle on your chest, and they hope to help the next person have the same pride."

The combination of Scout and Red Cross training is unbeatable. The crew has its own first-responder crash kits and can serve as the medical staff for the first

Unfortunately, most Red Cross personnel and supplies, including food, cots, and shelter kits, had already been moved farther north. And there was no way to get additional supplies from the main branch in Houston.



Eagle Scout Chris McKelvey had the honor of removing the American Red Cross shelter sign from the entrance to McCullough Junior High School, the last official act before the shelter closed.



This message of thanks was scrawled on a whiteboard in a classroom at the school.

Photos courtesy Jay Walker, Crew 911



Crew 911 Takes Preparedness to a New Level

Venturing Crew 911 is chartered to the Northern Branch Office Scout Training Team, which began as a unit training program for Boy Scout Troop 777 in The Woodlands, Texas. Since its inception in 1988, the team has trained more than 10,000 Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and adult volunteers in first aid, emergency response, and aquatics safety—and more than a dozen of them have been recognized by the Boy Scouts of America and the American Red Cross for acts of heroism. For more information, visit <http://www.scoutcpr.org>.



On Thursday, Sept. 22, Red Cross Branch Director Bob Cargo (who's also a Crew 911 leader) called on the crew to get the shelter open. A core group arrived about 2 P.M.; by 6 P.M., the crew—along with friends from area Boy Scout troops and the local Order of the Arrow lodge—was serving a hot meal to the shelter's first 200 residents.

"We fed the first bunch of people from the buses, and that went well," McKelvey said. "But people kept coming, and before we knew it, we were serving dinner to a huge amount of people."

The first bus to arrive was full of Alzheimer's patients from a Houston nursing home. Walker praised the crew members for their sensitivity in working with the patients, including the woman who brought a cat with her but didn't always remember that it was hers. They also dealt professionally with the nursing home dietician who accompanied the patients as they tried to plan appropriate menus. "We pretty much got inventive," McKelvey said.

The crew got inventive in other ways. Members called on friends from area Boy Scout troops, Venturing crews, and Sea Scout ships to help staff the shelter, while Venturer Whitney Davis roused her father in the middle of the night to bring supplies from an assistance program their church runs. "By 5 A.M., they had hygiene kits and food delivered," Cargo said.

The McCullough shelter actually ended up supplying another shelter with food, despite starting off with little more than leftover stocks from the school cafeteria. It also exported its Red Cross shelter manager to another location; he left Friday morning after realizing how well the crew was running the shelter. "You guys have it handled," he said.

The food got better as the weekend progressed, according to McKelvey. "Danny LeGaye [an Eagle Scout and the

crew's first president] and his sister Kristi came to help me out, and we decided to make a nice dinner," McKelvey said. "We made and served spaghetti to all those people, and it was pretty good, if I do say so myself. The people were glad, too; it was a nice change from cafeteria pizza and hamburgers."

Throughout the weekend, Walker said, the Venturers acted with true Scouting spirit. They dealt patiently with highly stressed adults, took on distasteful tasks like hauling stinking trash, and even did laundry on Friday night.

By the time the shelter closed Sunday morning at 10 A.M., the Scouts and Venturers had served more than 2,000 meals to nearly 600 shelter residents. Among the volunteers were at least 14 Eagle Scouts, including five key leaders from the crew.

Each volunteer had his own special memory of the weekend. For Cargo, it was the time when the young people helped remove an agitated woman from the shelter. For Walker, it was the moment when the school custodian came in and asked to speak with "the acting senior patrol leader"—not the adult in charge. For Chris McKelvey, it was the time that two words spoke volumes.

Throughout the weekend, he said, a young Hispanic woman with a baby had repeatedly asked him for *leche* (milk). On Sunday, as she and her husband left the shelter with a wagonload of odds and ends, she asked for *leche* once again. McKelvey brought her a case of milk and some formula. "Gracias," she said, a huge smile illuminating her face.

"It seems small in the scope of things, but perhaps their ride back was a bit better," McKelvey said. "And that's essentially what I think we were there for: a few smiling faces to alleviate just a tiny bit of doubt, fear, and trouble."