GETTING BY SEVEN YEARS LATER

For people who grew up in New Orleans, like me, time virtually stopped for four long months beginning on August 29th, 2005 when Hurricane Katrina came to town. Whenever a group of people from St. Tammany, Jefferson, Orleans, St. Bernard or Plaquemine Parishes get together for virtually any event, at some point the conversation will automatically drift back to that pivotal day. It has become a true defining point in life for those of us living in southeastern Louisiana.

Like a very bad dream, I got a serious case of Katrina Rewind when Hurricane Isaac rolled into town, uninvited. Whereas Katrina gave New Orleans a somewhat glancing blow, Isaac took the absolute worst track – moving dead slow and just west of the City. Thus, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, Orleans and St. Tammany Parishes in succession got nailed by the Hurricane’s northeast quadrant. Adding to the misery, Isaac pounded the area with 80mph wind, high tides (as much as 14ft above normal) and incessant rain for 36 long hours. Although the Regions new $14Billion floodwall and pump station projects performed generally well, areas outside the protection system that had never flooded before became inundated.

Water doesn’t compress, which means it will find some other place to go when forced. And, for those in lower Plaquemines and St. John Parish, it did.

For those who have never been through the eye of a hurricane, it is a test of patience coupled with awe at how small we humans really are in the face of Nature’s full fury. Once the wind starts blowing beyond about 40 mph, hurricane-sitting becomes a stay-indoors event (for most, in darkness as power lines start falling) and hours of waiting it out. With unending hours of idle time and waiting comes thinking - about significant past experiences.

Hunkered down for Isaac I was brought back to the days of uncharted territory, a prolonged Katrina recovery and initial fears that New Orleans would become a boutique city of sorts…if a city at all. It is one thing for a few houses to get damaged by wind, ice or hail. How about 83,000 square miles being instantaneously affected by one singular event? Or 80% of an entire American City submerged under eight to twenty feet of water…for weeks?

Imagine your town without places for people to live and the most basic of public services – lights, water, sewerage facilities, hospitals, food sources, telephones and Internet access – GONE. No banks in operation. No businesses open. No customers. No nothing. Lives forever changed in a matter of hours.

Well, such a cataclysmic event happened right here, seven years ago to the day.

Yet, borne out of Katrina’s fury was a tremendously spirited rebirth. The Orleans public school system has been essentially rebuilt from the ground up since not much was left standing. Test scores have dramatically improved and children seem to have a renewed sense of hope and purpose. The Superdome, once a symbol of everything gone wrong is now a gleaming, elegant success story of perseverance through adversity.

Business growth and investment throughout the Region has been on the rebound. In fact many high-tech software and hardware companies are moving in...
because the New Orleans area is just humming with life and vitality. Young people who flocked to the ravaged New Orleans area with a goal of helping the helpless soon found where New Orleanians are a quirky, crazy sort who will stand up to any challenge, but also love a good time, good food and good friends… and will give the shirt off their backs to friends, family and even perfect strangers in need.

So, many Katrina rescuers never returned home. Instead many have planted new roots, started new families and have embraced as their own South Louisiana’s many traditions. This is a hard place to leave.

Now that Isaac’s winds have died down and the task of clean-up has begun, Katrina Rewind racing past my mind’s eye is no more. There will likely be other storms that will force us to revisit life BK (Before Katrina) versus AK (After Katrina) as it is human nature to draw such comparisons.

One thing seems perfectly clear as the soggy mess of Hurricane Isaac gives way to cleanup and renewal: Few can resist the allure of New Orleans. We’ll keep enjoying our little piece of Paradise, offer up some lagniappe and work a bit harder to savor those very good times. Our doors are always open to those adventuresome and fun loving enough to wander in.


WILL LTE REPLACE LMR ANYTIME SOON?

With the recent allocation of the 700MHz D-Block to Public Safety and the possible grant of upwards of $7Billion to construct a nationwide public safety broadband network, many are itching to jump on the LMR is Dead bandwagon.

There won’t be any funeral processes for the land mobile radio service, LMR, anytime soon and for a load of reasons:

• The construction of a broadband long term evolution (LTE) system, nationwide, will consume a few hundred thousand infrastructure sites to gain coverage remotely in the realm of being termed nationwide.

• No voice standards, much less Project-25 compatible push-to-talk voice standards, currently exist for LTE broadband. If the standards process involved in Project-25, itself, is any indication that work will take many years.

• Even if standards did exist, $7B is nowhere near sufficient. As one guy suggested to me in passing, “$7B alone is analogous to dropping a bowling ball into the ocean.”

• Commercial-style packaging of LTE user equipment for public safety – particularly for the Fire Service- would have a survivability measured in days or hours rather than years. Significant hardening of these devices would be necessary and, unlike the commercial market, the number of potential buying customers is pitifully low to absorb the development and manufacturing costs. In short, expect to see LMR-style tiered pricing for LTE devices.

• Operational costs will be high since the number of potential users for a private public safety network is a mere fraction of the commercial market. Throw in the fact that a public safety network would require an order of magnitude greater operational reliability and coverage performance. That means lots of money from somebody (you) to keep the network viable.

In the immediate term, we will likely see LTE pilot and evaluation systems come into play as standards are fully refined and equipment solutions developed.

Those on technology’s “bleeding edge” tend to bleed a lot, particularly as better ideas are fleshed out. And, for at least the next ten years the principal use for public safety LTE will be for high-speed data mobility in urban areas.

Unless some significant enticements are given to commercial broadband carriers to provide coverage and/or infrastructure access in rural America, the growth of LTE will be a slow but steady process perhaps beginning within the next two years as Congress’s seed project takes root. In short, don’t plan on putting those two-way radios in the bottom desk drawer anytime soon!
As Hurricane Isaac bore down on New Orleans, virtually all of the news media’s attention was on the newly constructed US Army Corps of Engineers floodwall and pump systems. Built to the tune of $14Billion and designed for a Category 3 storm, Isaac was easily handled by the new facilities and the New Orleans area stayed high and dry.

But, other areas outside of the Hurricane Protection System, as it is called, flooded badly. One such area is the City of LaPlace in St. John the Baptist Parish, located about 35 miles west of New Orleans. LaPlace, the birth place of the early jazz musician Kid Ory, is home to significant sugar cane farming. Sugar cane does not like to grow submerged and so LaPlace is a relatively high spot at ten feet above sea level.

One of Laplace’s most affected subdivisions is one I had lived in from 1977 through 1993. River Forest had never experienced any flooding from hurricanes before and some such as Hurricane Juan had taken a path just west of the New Orleans as did Isaac. My old home had only 12 inches of water, but hundreds more had four or more feet. What changed?

The Corps claims they had studied flood scenarios while designing the new protection system and no new flooding outside the encompassed area should have occurred. Yet, for every drop of water that falls inside the Hurricane Protection System, nearly all is pumped out into Lake Ponchartrain, all the while the Lake is being filled up by storm surge.

And, of course, the water than would have been pushed into the eastern areas of the City, as has happened in the past, must surely go somewhere. Many of us would think that the somewhere would be those areas along the Lake, outside of the protection system.

While we are all very appreciative of the work completed, it is apparent than much more study and consideration is necessary before the champagne bottles can be opened and the flags waved.
TCS HALL OF SHAME – DO PEOPLE ACTUALLY READ R-56??

If so, it isn’t readily apparent by many of the system installation we stumble across in the field.

A disaster in the making, mission-critical infrastructure sites should never degrade to such a sad state. To prove not every site to be encountered is a Hall of Shame Candidate, here is an example of a large-scale system implementation TCS consultant Jack Hart is managing for Kansas City, Missouri.

It has been our experience if a site is installed properly and professionally, maintenance personnel will keep it that way. Conversely, if it looks like a bombed out, disheveled guy stumbling down Bourbon Street at 3AM… well, you get the idea.