

Middle school students get first hand EOC experience

BY LEE STEPHENS

As Hurricane computer images of Category 3 Hurricane Jamie got closer to South Florida's coast, mayors Kyle Bird and James Warmington were barking orders to their fellow Richmond Heights Middle School students over the telephone.

A fire in a shelter needed to be extinguished and 1,000 people relocated to other shelters in the area.

The Bird-Warmington duo's responsibility was to coordinate Emergency Support Functions (ESF in emergency management parlance) managed by their classmates (firefighting, transportation, law enforcement, search and rescue, medical assistance, housing and human services, and mass care, to name a few) to ensure that the dispossessed people were properly relocated to other shelters and safe from the approaching storm.

"Put the fire out first," ordered Warmington to his firefighters. "Then start removing the people," he directed Transportation.

As soon as the problem was resolved, an overturned truck on a major evacuation route left thousands of motorists stranded. Gas from the truck was spilling all over the road; people were overheated and thirsty,

and several fights erupted due to short tempers. Again, the mayors had to depend on their ESFs to resolve this perilous situation.

"We need to get water out to these people as soon as possible and remove the truck from the roadway," Bird demanded. "Get Resource Management (ESF 7) and Mass Care (ESF 6) on the phone. We need to move fast."

After Jamie's passage, they faced equally challenging emergencies such as several hundred senior citizens stranded on an island by a washed-out Intracoastal bridge.

"We've sent boats, helicopters and anything we can," Bird said.

In the meantime, a plane crashed into a residential community leaving people seriously injured. Jet fuel was everywhere and several adjacent fires erupted in the apartments struck by the plane. The students had to act quickly to save people, put out the fires and safeguard against the jet fuel igniting.

"We acted quickly and got the job done," Bird added proudly.

Forty-five students spent a Tuesday morning at the Miami-Dade County Emergency Operations Center participating in a special hurricane preparedness exercise called StormZone, where they planned for and recovered from



Richmond Heights Middle School students prepare to start the three-hour hurricane preparedness exercise at the Miami-Dade Emergency Operations Center on Tuesday, Oct. 24. Responsible for ESF No. 1 (Transportation) during the simulation are (l-r) Dana Miranda, Ronika Conner and Maegan Lee. The students are pictured with Dan Ludwig, DHL's senior vice president of humanitarian affairs.

Hurricane Jamie. StormZone, sponsored by DHL, Disaster Survival House in Deerfield Beach, and *The Miami Herald*, is being taught in middle and high school classrooms in Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Monroe public schools through hurricane season, which ends Nov. 30. The EOC field trip was a reenactment of Richmond Heights Middle's classroom exercise.

According to Dan Ludwig, senior vice president of humanitarian affairs at DHL, "The company's participation in the StormZone program is intended to foster a culture of preparedness in the community. I was very impressed by the students involved in this exercise and how they kept their composure under stressful situations. They were focused on solutions to problems that can really happen during disasters

which is great for their development and the community."

At the conclusion of the exercise, student mayors Bird and Warmington conducted a press conference in the EOC's Media Center to inform student reporters on preparedness measures that were taken prior to the storm and recovery efforts after its passage.

"The StormZone simulations provide students with an excellent education into how emergency operations centers function and illustrate the importance of communication, teamwork, local responders and being prepared," said Erik Salna, project coordinator, Hurricane Warning! at Disaster Survival House, who was the meteorologist at the event.

For more information about StormZone, contact Bay Proby, project director, at 305-670-0323.