

Refugio hospital completes repairs with funding help

Release Date: May 15, 2019

FEMA philanthropy team opens window to assistance

AUSTIN, Texas — After a disaster like Hurricane Harvey, it takes a village to put a village back together. Thousands of organizations have applied to FEMA for financial help with their recovery, in addition to any insurance payouts and support they have received from their local communities.

When that is not enough, organizations can still turn to FEMA for guidance.

“Our role is to assist those entities that are ineligible for state or federal assistance ... or to identify funding opportunities when there is a gap in coverage,” said Margaret Adams, a philanthropy adviser for FEMA. “I work a lot with local organizations and local foundations, building partnerships between those different groups.”

Recently, Adams and FEMA’s Hurricane Harvey philanthropy team helped build a relationship between the Refugio County Memorial Hospital and the Rebuild Texas Fund, which filled a vital need to help the hospital back on its feet.

Refugio County Memorial, the only hospital in the county, saw part of its roof torn off by Harvey, letting a deluge of water pour into the hospital. Among other damage, the hospital lost a variety of medical equipment and two air conditioners.



“I had never been through winds that high in my life. Never will again either: I’m not staying for another one,” said Peggy Maley, a laboratory technician at Refugio County Memorial who worked through the storm but plans to evacuate next time. “I remember texting my daughter-in-law to tell my grandkids how much we love them, because I didn’t know if we were going to make it.”

When the storm passed, the hospital used its insurance payout and grants from FEMA to keep operations moving and begin repairs. The insurance company, however, wouldn’t upgrade the hospital’s 121 damaged windows — it would only restore the windows to their previous condition, which was too weak to withstand future hurricanes.

FEMA provided over \$446,000 to replace medical equipment and rebuild a parapet wall, but the agency could not upgrade the hospital’s windows: Federal regulations would only allow the agency to restore the windows to their pre-Harvey condition.

“Once we determined the windows and some of the other pieces of recovery would be ineligible [for FEMA funding], we contacted the Rebuild Texas Fund,” Adams said. “The Rebuild Texas Fund has always been open to talking to us about not only who they can assist, but if they can’t assist, where we might be able to look for additional funding.”

Cristina Cornejo, program officer for the Rebuild Texas Fund, said she often receives notifications from FEMA that a city, community or nonprofit needs Harvey-recovery assistance.

“If there’s a project out there that we haven’t heard of, we want to be sure we’re learning more and figuring out how we can help,” Cornejo said. “In the case of the Refugio County Memorial Hospital, we looked at their needs and said, ‘This is absolutely a gap that we can fill in.’”



The Rebuild Texas Fund, a collaboration between the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and the OneStar Foundation, provided more than \$608,000 for the hospital to install 121 windows designed to withstand Category 4 winds.

The upgrade has improved the appearance of the hospital, eliminated drafty conditions and raised employee and patient morale, said Hoss Whitt, the hospital's CEO. Most importantly, the hospital will be prepared the next time a storm hits.

"This window project wouldn't have happened without [funding from the Rebuild Texas Fund] and it's something we desperately needed," Whitt said. "We just didn't have the funds to do it without the additional assistance."

To view a video on the Refugio County Memorial Hospital window project, visit <https://youtu.be/hmFThHzPkFU> or www.facebook.com/FEMAHarvey.

For additional information on Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the Hurricane Harvey disaster web page at www.fema.gov/disaster/4332, Facebook at www.facebook.com/FEMAHarvey, the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at www.twitter.com/FEMARegion6 or the Texas Division of Emergency Management website at www.dps.texas.gov/dem.

