

Hiring Local Residents is a Win-Win for FEMA and Florida

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ORLANDO, Fla. – FEMA is helping Florida's economy after Hurricane Irma not just by providing financial assistance to families and state and local governments. The agency also hires Florida residents to help with recovery.

The agency has hired more than 200 Floridians around the state, according to Federal Coordinating Officer Willie Nunn, head of FEMA's recovery mission in Florida.

"The positions are short-term temporary jobs working in numerous areas of the recovery operation but these hires are critical to our efforts and to helping the state get back on its feet," Nunn said. "Hiring Floridians not only brings valuable local knowledge to our team, it helps restore economic vitality to impacted areas."

On most federally-declared disasters, FEMA augments its regular workforce through its temporary local hire initiative. These positions generally last four months, though they can be extended up to a year depending on the need.

"The local workforce we have hired here is unusually highly skilled," Nunn said. "We have a number of engineers and managers who are working with our team and even architects assisting with environmental and historic preservation reviews."

Floridians have also been hired for positions that include performing administrative duties, serving as couriers and even assisting with media relations.

In addition to their local knowledge and experiences, disaster survivors bring a special understanding of the problems faced by their fellow survivors. They also help pump money back into the local economy; so far local hires have received more than \$2 million in federal wages.



Local hires come from various backgrounds, but what they almost always share is a desire to serve. That's what spurred John Hulme, a 70-year-old retired vice president of sales and operations for a metal products manufacturer, to join FEMA in early December 2017.

The Estero resident had tried "high season" employment in recent years, working at a national rental car agency during peak tourism season. He said it was "enjoyable, working with the public" but not particularly challenging. He saw firsthand the devastation Irma caused and decided helping his fellow citizens was what he wanted to do.

"This year, I said 'No, I'm going to do something meaningful. I'm either going to help people or just not bother,'" Hulme said. "And FEMA certainly fills that bill."

Past experience working as a carpenter and construction worker, coupled with overseeing his company's construction of several buildings and additions, landed him in FEMA's Public Assistance program. This program helps local, county and state governments and certain nonprofits recover from disasters. Hulme works with local governments to help them get reimbursed for debris removal costs.

"It's a steep learning curve, but every day I learn and it's becoming easier and easier," he said.

For Billy Sanchez, 37, service to others comes naturally. The Los Angeles native spent 14 years in the Marine Corps repairing small arms, machine guns and mortars and moved to Naples 18 months ago.

His home was spared damage, but neighbors were not so lucky. Some had roof damage or trees downed on their property.

The former staff sergeant had been thinking about getting back into government service so when Sanchez found the opportunity to join FEMA he jumped at the chance.

His first assignment was interacting with survivors and registering them for FEMA help. He also analyzed data to determine where FEMA needed to send registration teams.



In addition to temporary workers, FEMA has more than 1,500 personnel working around the state—nearly 700 of them at the agency's Orlando office.

Florida residents interested in these temporary positions can search for positions in their area at careers.fema.gov/hurricane.

For more information on Hurricane Irma and Florida recovery, visit www.FEMA.gov/IrmaFL, @FEMARegion4 Twitter account, or the Florida Division of Emergency Management website.

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FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362). For TTY call 800-462-7585.

FEMA's temporary housing assistance and grants for public transportation expenses, medical and dental expenses, and funeral and burial expenses do not require individuals to apply for an SBA loan. However, applicants who receive SBA loan applications must submit them to SBA to be eligible for assistance that covers personal property, vehicle repair or replacement, and moving and storage expenses.



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