

City responds well in Irene's aftermath

Hawkins credits employees for helping residents

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. congratulated the city's employees for their response to Hurricane Irene.

"The flow of information to the public by my office staff, public relations team and other departments was both critical and effective during Hurricane Irene," said Hawkins, who also serves as the city's emergency management coordinator.

"I was out and about during the night of the storm and have received numerous compliments from various individuals," he continued. "Not only about the extent to which they were kept informed, but also the responsiveness of police, fire, public works and other emergency management personnel throughout the night of the storm and during the aftermath."

Although Hurricane Irene was downgraded to a tropical storm Sunday, Hawkins and other city officials said the status did not mean the storm did not cause damage. That is why Hawkins credited municipal employees for their work.

Hawkins recommended residents contact their insurance agents to discuss claims and to make sure cleanup contractors are qualified to do the job.

South Ward Councilman Edward Marable said he agreed with Hawkins. Marable said he believed the city employees have performed well so far and that the bar has been set pretty high for contractor performance.



Hurricane Irene left downed trees throughout the city, mainly in the South Ward.

Photo By Chris Sykes

Marable added residents in his ward experienced power outages as well as downed trees and limbs.

"The South Ward was hit pretty hard and there were a lot of trees down, but the biggest problems that I'm aware of is the loss of power and the flooding of basements," Marable said. "The flooding of basements is problematic because there are boilers and electrical conduits and things down there. I did a lot of walking around and driving around talking to residents and going into their homes and that was probably the biggest issue."

Marable said while Hawkins had to approach the storm and aftermath on a general level, he said his approach was to deal with residents' problems on a personal level.

"Once again I opened my home to anyone who needed it. But I was out of the country in England for two weeks and I didn't get back until that Saturday morning at 2 a.m.," said Marable. "When I did get back, I had an issue related to a death in the family to deal with, too, and then the storm hit. If I had been here in town I would have

been more involved in the planning."

That said, Marable added he was proud of the way the city's employees handled their responsibilities during and after the storm. He noted the Department of Public Works was "tremendously responsive."

"All of the fallen trees that I saw did not fall on homes or vehicles and that was interesting, but I did see trees that were blocking streets," said Marable. "Public Works was right there on the job dealing with them. I was very

pleased at their prompt response. They did a very good job under difficult circumstances."

Raymond Wingfield, president of the Orange Municipal Employees Benevolent Association, the union that represents the city's nonuniformed workers, said he was glad Hawkins gave kudos to his members.

"We've been working constantly since last Saturday when the storm first hit up through Wednesday this week," said Wingfield. "We're going to be busy for the foreseeable future."