10 YEARS AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA

Cajundome shelter set the standard

EVACUEES KEPT COMING, FINDING 'HOME,' COMFORT

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Greg Davis was at home hosting relatives who evacuated New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina when he got the call: The Cajundome and its staff were being called on to operate a short-term shelter.

That meant providing a temporary place for evacuees to eat and sleep.

"But when the buses started coming, they kept coming and coming and we began to hear the stories of the evacuees, we began to realize this was a major disaster unlike any we had seen before and we had to gear up to do something we had never done before," the Cajundome director said Thursday.

Over the next 88 days, the 20-year-old sports and concert arena would be home to more than 18,000 people who were given a place to sleep, three hot meals a day, clothes, showers, medical care, day care and an on-site post office with its own ZIP code.

The old manual on how to operate emergency shelters was tossed aside. It simply didn't apply to the

See SHELTER, Page 10A
58
Number of days the Cajundome served as a mega-shelter for Hurricane Katrina and Rita evacuees.

18,500
Total number of people who were housed at the Cajundome.

406,000
Number of meals provided to evacuees and first responders at the Cajundome shelter.

3,500
Number of people treated at emergency medical unit at the Cajundome Convention Center in the first 10 days following Katrina.

700
Pounds of grits cooked every morning at the Cajundome.

$3.7M
Sheltering costs, including utilities, security and transportation.

$1.4M
Repair costs, including painting and waste disposal.

$50K
Food costs per day to feed evacuees.

Inside
Meet a musician who escaped Katrina and found inspiration and a home in Acadiana.

Next Sunday
» Explore the ways Katrina changed the Hub City.

Canjundome employees expected to house a few hundred after Katrina hit; what they got were thousands.
Amber Broussard from Jennings holds up a sign with Lillian Brumfield's name on it, Sept. 4, 2005, at the Cajundome. Broussard was trying to locate Brumfield to take her to a home in Jennings.

Katrina

Continued from Page 1A

The Cajundome mega-shelter the Cajundome and Convention Center had become. Cajundome employees took on new roles, some working 30-40 hours without sleep. Some became so attached to their new residents that they stayed in touch 10 years later. One young woman stopped by recently to say goodbye. A child during Katrina, she's now heading off to college.

The Cajundome mega-shelter under the direction of Davis stands as a model today of how to do it right. Davis was a lead author on a mega-shelter guidebook for the International Association of Venue Management and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

No trouble here

The day after Katrina hit, on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005, several evacuees arrived in their own vehicles and were waiting outside the Cajundome before the facility opened its doors as a shelter.

“The first person I saw here was a lady with a baby. And she had no supplies,” operations director Phil Ashurst said.

“She was in Suite 22,” Pat Wright, facility services director, recalled recently.

Told to expect a few hundred people, the Cajundome staff and Red Cross weren't prepared for the busloads of people — including the elderly and children — that would soon arrive, tired, hungry, dirty, sick, many with only the clothes on their backs. Some had waded through filthy water to reach the Superdome or Convention Center. Some were rescued from their flooded homes. The arrival of one bus came too late for an elderly man who died along the way.

Despite seeing and hearing news about looters and criminals in New
found bus drivers by 3 a.m., the buses were load- ed with people, ice chests and coolers and on their way to New Orleans at 5 a.m.

"No much love"

Some of the Cajun- dans staff look tiredly upon the days following Katrina.

"It was a beautiful time for me and some of the guys in the back," musing police supervisor John Davis IV said.

"We had a lot of people. The streets were full of people. I could say it was very rewarding," said Gail Siebert, Cajun Dans public relations director.

"We got here people that couldn't help themselves. There wasn't a day that somebody wasn't telling you 'Thank you.'"

After nearly 60 months officials decided it was time to move re- maining residents to a smaller facility and let the Cajun Dans return to its normal purpose.

The town staff is glad to be reunited and will work to develop the site further.

"It's a wonderful site for kids of all ages to play together," Davis IV said.

The community's gradual and necessary transition to life after Katrina was hailed as a success.

"They said, 'We never thought we'd see this again,'" Davis IV recalled.
"They said they had never seen so much love."

Cajun Dans residents, evacuees from Hurricane Katrina, watch as their President George B. Bush addresses the nation. Evacuees spent 56 days inside the Cajun Dans.