

The Piermont Newsletter

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WINTER 2012

SUPERSTORM



Hardly a dock remained from Piermont to Hook Mountain and boats were stacked up on Piermont Avenue after Superstorm Sandy. Photo by Sheriff's Bureau of Criminal Identification.

Editor's note: Every Piermonter has a story to tell about Hurricane Sandy. Writer Margaret Grace recounts some of them in this article.

It was 9:30 pm when Liz and Kevin Fagan waded into knee-deep water. They were on their way to evacuate 92-year-old Charles Henderson from his flooding riverside home. They found him in his bed sound asleep. Using an ATV (all terrain vehicle), they brought him to the firehouse. Like fellow emergency workers, they had to ford a sea of accumulating debris on Main Street in wind

that was gusting to 70 mph.

Down on Ladik Street in the Patch, Mark Blomquist and other firefighters worked in the dark in waist-high black water to turn off gas in the neighborhoods' submerged homes. "It was the most surreal thing I have ever experienced," Mark recalls. Most Paradise Avenue and Patch residents heeded the Mayor's evacuation request. They moved their cars to "high ground" behind the bike shop, and sought refuge elsewhere. All of those cars, some 20 in all, were later lost in the flood surge.

Octogenarian Kathryn Smith, liv-

ing in the same Paradise Avenue house she grew up in, moved to the second floor to wait out the storm. Another lifelong Piermonter, Bill Herguth of Paradise Canoe and Kayak, also stayed. When he stepped out onto his porch at dawn, he found a water-filled bucket with a fish swimming in it.

Piermonters saw the initial effects of a 7-foot high tide at mid-day on Monday. The bad timing of a full moon was adding more water to Sandy's devastating delivery. High Tides at 10 pm promised to be more than 9 feet.

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President's Corner



Our losses from Hurricane Sandy are incalculable. We wonder if our lovely little village will ever shine with the same glow it has had in recent years? There is no way to tell.

Like many Piermonters, we are suffering post storm depression. We watched helplessly as a powerful bully knocked down someone we loved, assaulted them and kicked them senseless. Sandy has stolen our innocence.

It shouldn't have been a surprise. Scientists like our own Klaus Jacob warned for years that such a storm was possible, even inevitable. Global warming is melting the ice caps. They say the river is a foot higher now than it was 100 years ago and it continues to rise. The ocean warms, making for storms that are ever more potent.

Most of us never doubted Klaus and his colleagues. We believe in science. We never questioned the reality of global warming. However, it is one thing to accept all that and yet another to experience it. There are people in Northern California who live in houses that straddle the San Andreas Fault. They know that someday an earthquake—maybe the Big One—will strike. They'll lose everything, possibly even their lives.

It's that word—someday—that preserves our innocence. For Piermonters, someday came on an October Monday with Hurricane Sandy. Even though we have lived through many terrible storms, including Irene just last year, Sandy was the first to show us the brutal and devastating power of

a tidal surge. It destroyed houses, businesses, cars and boats. It turned off our lights, heat, phones and internet.

Now we wonder if this is our new world. Who could have imagined our Main Street businesses flooded with river water? What happens to our downtown if storms like Sandy become routine? Will the Hudson cover our pier? Will homes and buildings near the water have to be built on pilings?

Yes, Sandy has stolen our innocence.

~Bob Samuels



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Dearest Piermont,

My heart goes out to you for what you have endured; yet I am amazed at your resilience and proud of how you performed in the face of a catastrophe.

We have withstood another brutal storm that turned the Hudson into a raging ocean. Sandy approached our Village pushing a historic mountain of water in front of her. North-east winds blasted a swollen river, tearing apart docks and decks along the coastline. When the high tide arrived late Monday night, the winds shifted east and forced the Hudson and this debris through the Village, smashing past our marinas, breaching Piermont Avenue, flooding entire neighborhoods and inundating the Main Street Business District.

But we fought back!

Through the rage of the storm, the Piermont Volunteer Fire Department and DPW blazed a trail among the downed trees on 9W and debris along River Road, forging an emergency route out of the Village. Our Police Department, DPW and volunteer first responders held vigil at the fire department throughout the night.

By daybreak, remnants of boats, docks, and homes littered the Village. River mud, mixed with oil and sewage, coated everything below the high water mark. Homes and possessions were destroyed. Power was gone, leaving us in the dark, cold and seemingly alone.

But we showed our strength!



Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (center), Mayor Chris Sanders and other officials toured Piermont after the storm. Photo by Charlie Samuels.

Our Volunteer Fire Department and DPW began work. Basements were drained and debris pushed away. The Ladies Auxiliary put together a team to feed and provide shelter to Village residents as we faced weeks without electricity. Residents signed up to help at the Fire Department, donations poured in. We pulled together.

Now we're rebuilding. We've carted away damaged parts of our buildings and our ruined possessions. We've cleared our streets and yards, dried our homes and opened our businesses. We're repairing and replacing, and getting back to normal.

What seems so ordinary to us is truly extraordinary. Working together, we have met another challenge and have overcome adversity. Thanks to our volunteers, dedicated employees and residents, we shined through this calamity and will rise to meet any other.

We are Piermont!

Piermont Mayor Chris Sanders

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Superstorm Sandy Through The Eyes Of The DPW



Senator Kirsten Gillibrand visits residents hit hard by the storm. Photo by Charlie Samuels.

Editor's Note: As day turned to night on October 29th, the time when Superstorm Sandy was predicted to make landfall somewhere in New York or New Jersey, the Piermont DPW, fresh from its struggles with Hurricane Irene only a year before, had made extensive preparations for the big storm. Their biggest challenge that night as it turned out was a life-saving mission.

In the days leading up to the storm, we started preparing sandbags for the residents of Piermont, as we would do for any coastal storm with a threat of severe flooding. In all, over 1,500 sandbags were filled and distributed to the problem areas of the village and to the residents that had asked for them. Because the storm was being

compared with Hurricane Irene and after a briefing that involved both the Piermont Fire Department and Police Department, it was decided that we would have barricades in place to shut down roads, i.e. Paradise Avenue, in advance of the flooding. It was also decided to close off the North Parking Lot and Parking Lot D and to suspend the overnight parking rules for the village streets.

The morning of the storm, we performed our normal duties of garbage collection along with making some last-minute preparations, such as securing all of the garbage receptacles from the Pier, turning off the gas feed to the Goswick Pavilion, removing the flags from all of the parks and mov-

ing some equipment in our Ohio Street storage yard to what we believed was higher ground. We soon found out that this was not high enough. We also prepared for a heavy rain event in which we make sure all of our storm drains are clear of leaves including the known problem areas, such as the Route 9W drains and the Erie Path drainage ditch, which runs from Ash Street north to the village line of Piermont/Grandview. The water level in the Ferdon Avenue Pond was lowered because we expected heavy runoff and potential flooding above the dam. The morning high tide brought flooding to the low-lying areas of the village and when the time for low tide approached, we noticed that the water level never really receded and was still at about the normal high for an astronomical tide level. We knew that Piermont was in for a long night. As the day progressed and the winds picked up, we had trees fall on several village streets, which the DPW crew cleared right away.

The DPW crew stood by at the DPW garage during the early evening hours for calls for tree limbs, trees or any other calls for assistance that might be needed from them. That is when we finally lost our power to the building. We watched through the night as the tide rose and reached the level of Hurricane Irene and we still had a few hours to go to high tide. We witnessed several people that risked their lives and vehicles as they drove through the flood waters on Piermont Avenue near the DPW garage and as one became stuck. We sent out our front-end loader with a driver and a man secured to the front bucket to retrieve the person from their car. Another call for help from the

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police was answered to bring an officer with our front-end loader to check the welfare of a resident on Piermont Avenue. We assisted several families that were unable to get out of their flooded homes also using the front-end loader and big dump truck.

With all of this happening, the water was still rising causing our crew to move their personal vehicles to higher ground. Then, for the first time ever, the water entered the garage. We scrambled to move our small equipment to higher ground. At the highest point, we had over a foot and a half of water in our bays.

In the early hours of the next day as the winds and tide started to recede, our crew along with members of the Fire Department Diving Team started to push back the boats off of Piermont Avenue to open a lane for emergency vehicles. Our crew made sure that the streets without downed wires were passable. After almost 24 hours of work, we went home for a short, but well deserved break only to return in four hours to start the cleanup effort.

As of this writing, it has been four weeks since the storm and we are continuing to remove debris and brush from the village.

I would take this opportunity to thank the Piermont Fire Department with Chief Fagan and the Piermont Ladies Auxiliary, Chief Michael O'Shea and the Police Department, R.C. O.E.M., Mayor Chris Sanders and the Board of Trustees for supporting our efforts and to the Suffern DPW, Nyack DPW and the Rockland County Highway Department for use of their equipment.

I would also like to thank the crew of the DPW for a job

well done. All of them were affected by the storm in one way or another and still performed like the professionals we know them to be. The Village of Piermont should be as proud of them as I am to have such a fine group of men working for us.

~Thomas Temple, Superintendent of Public Works

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Days And Nights Of Teamwork In Piermont

As Superstorm Sandy churned ever closer to the East Coast on October 29th, the winds howled and the morning high tide breached local streets. The water stayed high all day, never receding even at the afternoon low tide. As evening approached—still hours away from the 10:30 p.m. high tide and the storm's landfall—the feared storm surge moved across Piermont—the Police, Fire and Public Works Departments knew it was going to be a long, difficult night.

"It was a surreal night in Piermont the night of October 29th," Piermont Police Chief Michael O'Shea recalled. "The waters got higher and higher and there came a point where we could no longer use our patrol cars. Then our four-wheel drive vehicles became useless as the water deepened further. We called Tom Temple at the Department of Public Works and he dispatched a front-end bucket loader to the police station and officer Patrick Gaynor and Jason Mounier of the Public Works

Department jumped on board and went out to help people."

The Police Department got several hundred calls during the night of the storm and the day after. Chief O'Shea recalled one chilling call from a man on Piermont Avenue who said he had a gas leak and needed help NOW! Police officers Steve Luther and John Dowd waded through the water to his house, found the gas shut-off and closed it. "The man called us the next day to say that he did not know how the policemen got to him but thank God they did," said the Chief.

Piermont has had bad storms in the past with high winds and water on Main Street, but nothing like this. "We have a generator here at the police station and at one point, the generator crashed. We worked with our portable radios, cell phones and flashlights. We contacted the Rockland County Emergency Operations Center (EOC). We said that in two hours, everything will go down and we will have no way to

communicate with the village.

"When our four-wheel drive vehicle stopped working we called the Sheriff's Department and said we needed a four-wheel drive vehicle now. Within 20 minutes one was on the way down. The Orangetown and Suffern Police Departments were wonderful. Suffern offered to send police cars and officers to help," he said.

Chief O'Shea said that the teamwork in the village was tremendous. "I want to commend the Police, Highway and Fire Departments for their work and the incredible teamwork among the departments. Further, I cannot say enough good things about the Salvation Army," said the Police Chief. "We had to feed people because people lost their stoves and everything else. The Salvation Army was here delivering three meals a day for a week and they were lovely people. This is the best organization I have ever dealt with in this capacity."

The Chief has recommendations for

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future weather events in the village. They include:

- If you see anything out of the ordinary, report it to the police. During the first hours after the Superstorm, the police investigated six crimes along with handling all of the other emergencies.

- If you take medications, make sure you have an adequate supply on hand for a few days. Besides medicine, have water and canned food available to survive for several days.

- Get your flashlights and batteries now because when a large storm hits, it is too late.

- Think about buying and installing a generator to cope with multi-day power outages.

For all the destruction and difficulty that the storm caused, Chief O'Shea said that probably the one thing that stands out most to him was that each morning village residents brought bagels and urns of coffee to those who had worked through the night protect-




The damage was extensive, but Piermont will come back. Photo by Charlie Samuels.

ing the village and clearing streets and power lines. "Working 16-hour days, by early morning we needed a strong

jolt of coffee. We are so thankful in the way village residents responded."

~Ron Derven

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It Brought The Mayor To Tears

When Piermont's mayor first saw the devastation Hurricane Sandy left in her wake he cried. "It just brought me to tears to see what had happened," Chris Sanders admitted, "but what happened after that made me realize what a wonderful place we live in.

"You know it's not the creek, not the river, not the beautiful mountain, the boats or how scenic Piermont is that makes us exceptional -- it is the people here," he explained. "It is just unbelievable the way everybody came together, and everybody understood what we were all going through, and what we are going to continue to go through. We are lucky to have many generations of Piermonters here. They weren't priced out of the village the way maybe they were in some of the river villages in Westchester.

"You don't take the way the village pulls together for granted, but you do kind of take it for normal until you see the way they struggle everywhere else. Then you begin to realize how special we are. I'm not the only one who thinks

that. I hear it from everyone. Even the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and accounting reps that came through the village as part of the emergency management team tell me what an amazing village we have.

"They were impressed by the way we were clearing everything out at breakneck speed and getting everything open and running as quickly as possible. They saw how we were working nonstop to get people's damaged homes restored so they could return to them. They also saw how dedicated our Fire Department is, and the meals the auxiliary served and the volunteers we had just to be there for people if they needed it."

Observers say Sanders himself has been amazing. From day one, he's been all over the village, listening and offering help and encouragement. He summoned an astonishing who's who of government bigwigs to see the damage and to help Piermont. It included both our United States Senators, our Congresswoman and a long roster of state and county officials. As a result, the vil-

lage is getting the maximum amount of outside help.

"We certainly will be reimbursed for any repairs to our infrastructure," said Sanders, "although until we get all of our paperwork done it is really hard to know how what the FEMA reimbursements will be. FEMA only reimburses the village 75 percent --the state could end up picking up the remaining 25 percent, of the county could pick it up."

How will the village guard itself from the future storms that scientists say are coming? Will we need dikes to protect a business district? Will new waterfront buildings have to be on pilings? "I think we have to look at our zoning regulations for Paradise Avenue and the Patch and along the riverfront," said the Mayor. "Amending our zoning will take some time. We will let the LWRP (Local Waterfront Revitalization Program) and the village residents be involved with that," he promised.

~Bob Samuels

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Left: Children paddle canoes on formerly dry land. Photo by Ivanya Alpert.



Right: The boathouse at the end of the Piermont Pier suffered extensive damage. Photo by Sheriff's Bureau of Criminal Identification.

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SUPERSTORM continued from page 1

(Hurricane Irene a year ago handed low-lying residents a 7.3 foot tide.) The water was edging across main street midday, with the wind blowing at a steady 35 mph and building. By 5 pm the river was furious and the next high tide was still hours away.

"It was insanely dangerous to be outside during the height of the storm," remembers Police Chief Mike O'Shea. "At one point I ordered my men back. As darkness fell and electricity went out, we heard people to the north screaming for help. "All village departments were working together. We had two patrolmen, Pat Gaynor in the bucket loader and John Dowd in the dump truck, responding to calls for rescue.

"They were able to push through the dozens of boats that were pulled from their stands and moorings," recalls the Chief. "Sections of docks and debris

had become battering rams as waves sent them floating uncontrollably onto Piermont Avenue, crashing into each other, and any structure in the way. When the police generator failed, Dan Goswick came up with another one. The County Sheriff's office sent SUVs, flares, backup officers."

As the wind changed direction during the night, now coming out of the south, Suren Kilerciyan said that his Cornetta's Restaurant and Marina took its worst punches. Gone are his waterfront dining area and the south seawall he replaced just last year after Irene. Twelve feet up the outside walls of the restaurant are deep gouges, carved by loose boats and lumber pounding the building as they pushed their way out to Piermont Avenue.

Even as he surveyed the storm damage, Suren said he's going to rebuild. "I have been in this business too long to try

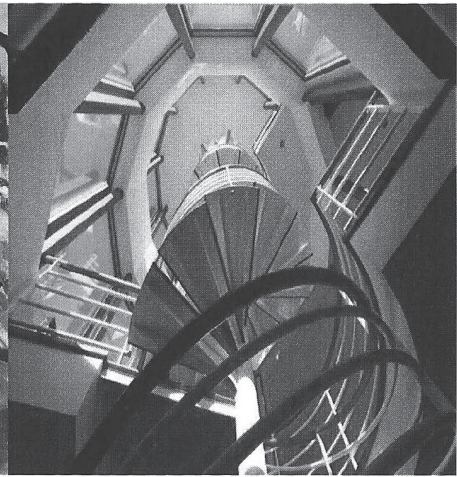
something else. What matters is that no one was hurt or killed. The mayor and village departments worked magnificently," he added. "The highway crew was here as soon as there was light, clearing away mountains of dangerous debris. "The only question anyone ever asked was, 'What do you need?' Magnificent!"

At the north end of Piermont near St. John's Church, thick, 20-foot-long wave driven bulkhead boards had broached the front porch of Stan Jacobs' 100-year-old waterfront home. A rogue 26-foot sailboat was now jammed against the building. With each surging wave, the boat's hull was smashing the front wall of the house, its mast banging against the third floor windows. Eventually, the boat broke free and beached in back of St. Johns church.

Hardly a pier or dock remains from
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The Yellow House used with permission



Glass House, Cornwall, NY

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An unbelievable amount of damage was done to the village. Photo by Naomi Vargas.



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SUPERSTORM continued from page 10

Piermont to Hook Mountain. Memorial benches from the Piermont Pier washed ashore upriver, and piles of wood and flotsam tell a story of indiscriminate force.

For business in Piermont, still struggling from the recession, Sandy represented a cruel setback. Infrastructure and equipment were destroyed, and the village was closed to all but residents for several days due to clear hazards and vulnerability of damaged property. Federal Emergency Management Assistance, (FEMA) arrived to help stricken residents, but does not service businesses.

On Thursday, the village called a meeting. For upland residents, it was the first close look at what had befallen the lower village. It was a shocking sight. Mayor Chris Sanders addressed the gathered crowd, along with many other local government officials and the County Department of Mental Health. Fees for building would be waived, it was announced, and the village would fast-track approvals needed to get people back into their homes. The mayor promised to work closely with state and federal agencies to find the resources to help our struggling businesses. By Friday, the County was declared a disaster area.

Piermonters, west of the dam, on both sides of the Sparkill Creek, felt spared as did hillside residents. Because of the lack of heavy rain during Sandy, floodwater did not inundate the creek or send runoff downhill. East of the dam, the tidal surge pushed the water to historic highs.

Most hillside residents woke up on Tuesday, October 30, stunned to find that despite the 60 mile per hour winds during the night, trees held, and that the landslides that accompanied hurricane Hugo almost a decade earlier, failed to materialize. It felt like we dodged a bullet up here, one resident said.


Along the river, the village was helped by other fire districts, the County Sheriff's department, the Salvation Army, the National Guard, FEMA and the Red Cross. But most impressive was the way the village helped itself.

Mayor Sanders, our police, DPW, Fire and EMT responders worked around the clock in extremely dangerous conditions.

The firehouse became more than a shelter as it served as a community center where residents and emergency workers could get hot meals all day

long under the management of the Empire Hose Company's Ladies Auxiliary headed up by Michelle Ables. Neighbors took in the displaced, did their laundry, staffed the relief kitchen.

The community as a whole mourns many things we love -- A damaged
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Cafe Portofino's driveway after the storm. Photo by Donna Riley.



Boats were flung everywhere at the height of the storm. Photo by Laurie Lahey.

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SUPERSTORM

continued from page 12

Piermont pier, safe waterfront access, a damaged ball field and Goswick Pavilion and wrecked brand new water rescue building, our post office and the security of once fortified bulkheads against the Hudson.

Those most affected have difficult decisions to make. New resident Chris Winfree, wife Erin and baby daughter Erica's recently renovated home's high-impact glass held solid during the storm, although the river found its way in along every other possible route. They are living in a mobile home on their property while repairs are done. Some neighbors to the north have reached their disaster limit and have indicated they will move on.

In April, it will be 25 years since the start of construction of Piermont Landing. It was the beginning of Piermont's transformation from an industrial village. Perhaps, Sandy and the effects of climate change have brought us to another seminal crossroads. Again, the challenge presents itself to preserve our history as we rebuild for a changing future. For some, the challenge is learning to love the Hudson again.

~Margaret Grace

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