

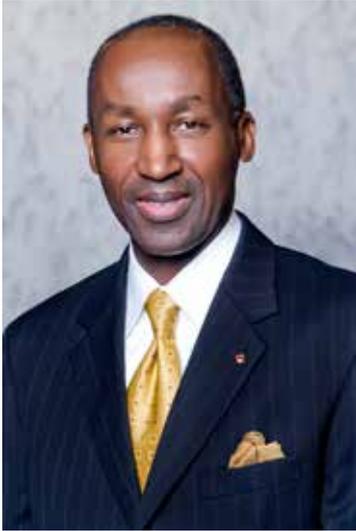
Rising *above*



Stories of employees
rising to the occasion
when it mattered most.

The 2013
Halloween Floods

Letter from the City Manager



For all of us, the flooding Austin experienced in Oct. 2013 is a moment we won't forget. The devastating impact it had on our community, and in particular the Dove Springs/Onion Creek neighborhoods, continues to be felt today.

In those critical hours during and after the floods, employees from across the organization stepped forward in remarkable ways. I would hear about the heroic

efforts some employees took to save lives and property, and witnessed amazing acts of kindness and humanity in the field during recovery.

All of this was occurring under stressful, uncertain and shifting circumstances that could overwhelm the most dedicated of employees. Yet there you were - day after day - single-mindedly focused on helping our residents recover. The human element that our employees brought to recovery efforts truly showed the depth of commitment you have for our residents.

As I reflected on that day, and the days and weeks that followed, it became more and more important to me that we take a moment to capture as many of those stories as we could. Some are extraordinary stories of personal, life-saving heroism. Others are simple acts of kindness and selfless actions that showed compassion and genuine care for our residents and our fellow employees.

All of them combined provide just a snapshot of the work done by hundreds of employees to respond to the disaster. In total, we had more than 130 nominations where employees took the time and thought to recognize their peers.

I want to thank each and every one of you who contributed to the response and recovery efforts, and those who continue to work with the community to recover. I also want to thank our elected leaders for continuing to support our efforts, and providing policy leadership that will have a lasting impact for our residents. I consider it an honor to work with such a dedicated, professional and compassionate team.

Certainly, there are always lessons to be learned from these events - lessons that will help us perform even better in the future. That's something that many of us are now focused on. But I don't want that to diminish the performance you all showed in this instance. What will always be a constant is the extraordinary commitment and resolve our employees bring to their work - especially in times of great need for the community.

For each one of the stories told here, I'm certain there are a dozen more like them. This publication is dedicated to you, the employees, and all of the work you've done. I can think of no better example of our PRIDE values in action, and I hope you find the same.

We will continue our efforts to help the community rebuild, and to take residents out of harm's way. We will continue to seek creative solutions to the complex problems ahead of us. And we will continue to do it all with dedication and resolve. There's still hard work ahead, but I know that we're up to it.

Thank you for who you are, and thank you for what you do. I hope that this publication provides an opportunity for celebration, reflection and inspiration.



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No Barricades *to Heroism*

Darain Anderson & Tommy Hernandez

Public Works Department

Street and Bridge maintenance workers Darain Anderson and Tommy Hernandez were dispatched to the Pinehurst neighborhood on the night of the Halloween Floods to set up barricades. They drove into an unlighted area where barricades were needed, but were stopped by rising floodwaters. As they began reversing the truck, the men spotted a moving light in the dark. They rolled down the windows in the rain and heard a cry for help.

Anderson and Hernandez could have retreated and assumed other rescuers would arrive. Instead, they removed their boots, placed their wallets in the truck, and plunged out into the dark, 5-foot deep, icy-cold floodwaters toward the waving flashlight. The current was dangerously strong. The men had to hold on to each other to walk through the floodwaters; even so, they were pulled underwater at times by the current.

They found an elderly couple holding on to their mailbox to keep from being swept away by the current. They helped the couple get to higher ground. Then a woman came up to them and begged them to rescue her elderly parents, who did not walk well, from their house. Anderson and Hernandez went back out into the floodwater to find them. Anderson carried the elderly woman to safety first, then returned and helped Hernandez get the elderly man out to safety.

They then heard cries for help from a two-story house. They waded back out through the chest-high water and found a trapped family of four – a mother and father with a 3-year-old daughter and a 4-year old son. The floodwaters had risen over the front door. Anderson, the taller of the two men, climbed to the second floor using whatever footholds and handholds he could find. The parents first handed out their little daughter. Anderson climbed down and gave the child to

Hernandez, who got her to safety. They repeated the rescue again for the little boy, then his mother, and finally the family dog. The father was too large to be carried; to escape, he jumped into the deep water. He went under, but Hernandez and Anderson pulled him up and got him to safety beside his family.

Their next rescue was a retired sheriff. When they entered the house the man said he didn't want to leave without his cat. They had to move the refrigerator to find the frightened pet. When the man saw his cat was still alive, he began to cry with relief and gratitude. The men got them both to dry land. The men continued their efforts, rescuing 10 people in all, as well as pets. They stopped only when the Austin Fire Department arrived, with trained firefighters who took over the rescue operations.

“Darain and Tommy responded with the kind of real-life heroism we all hope we would demonstrate – not hesitating to put their own lives in danger to assist others in an emergency situation,” said Colly Kreidler at Public Works. “The people they rescued will retell to their children and even their grandchildren the story of how two men appeared to save them in the Halloween flood of 2013.”

One of the people they rescued that night was Bill Rohrman. He called the Director of Public Works with this heartfelt message: “I want to express my gratitude to the employees that saved my life. My wife and I are just so thankful to be alive.”

Responding to Disaster

As floodwaters rose, City of Austin employees began taking action to protect life and property in affected areas. In addition to our emergency responders, Watershed Protection was in the background, providing support and intelligence to support their efforts.

Austin Fire Department Boat Division

Nominated by Todd Pomroy

This team was put to the test as the floodwaters continued to rise. Through the night and early morning, boat teams from AFD were on the scene. Working in swirling and unpredictable waters, and navigating through debris that included floating vehicles, barbed wire and fallen trees, crews maintained their focus on the task at hand: saving lives.

With so many individuals seeking rescue, the team had to maintain strict discipline, focusing on those in imminent danger. They pulled people from vehicles being swept away in the current, took significant risk to rescue children in need, and at times left the relative safety of the boat - in one case to enter a structure to rescue a wheelchair-bound man already up to his neck in floodwaters.

Their only question after each successive rescue: “What’s the next address?”

Austin Police Department - Patrol

Nominated by Todd Myers

Austin Police Department patrol officers were responding throughout, providing support to rescue operations while concurrently supporting closures and maintaining safety in the midst of the event.

While STAR Flight worked from the air, and multiple agencies worked from the water and on foot, two officers saw an opportunity - Officers Weston Henrichs and Michael Fickel realized that a passing dump truck provided both the height and the ground clearance to assist, and they took action.

Borrowing the dump truck, they were able to navigate through the high waters to reach multiple residents who were awaiting rescue from rooftops and deliver them to safety.

As a fellow officer noted afterward, these officers “used initiative to think outside the box and expedite the removal of citizens” at a time when speed was of the essence.

Austin Police Department Emergency Communications

Nominated by Robyn Daigle, Jason Helfond & Ted Bradshaw

On the front line of all of this were the employees at the 9-1-1 communications center, where employees were experiencing a flood of their own - of phone calls - from residents throughout the affected areas seeking assistance as the waters rose.

Led by Amanda Rogers and Kim Lamb, many of those coming off of an already-busy night shift stayed on to maintain contact and communication with residents facing rising floodwaters. Staff in the center maintained focus, processed calls as quickly as the situation allowed, and offered comfort and advice to those awaiting rescue, while leadership worked with staff to adapt quickly to changing conditions.

While difficult calls can be part of the staff’s shift at any given time, the frequency and volume on the morning of Oct. 31 was unprecedented for most at the center. In what was both a stressful and emotionally-draining time for these employees, they were able to rise to the occasion and focus on those residents in need.

As one nominator noted, “Their coming together as a team in the face of calamity...is in part what makes them a special breed of people.”

Austin/Travis County EMS Special Operations

Nominated by Michael Kittok & Jasper Brown

Working alongside AFD were our EMS personnel, assisting with rescue and continuing with critical treatment for those affected. While their daily duties are focused on providing critical medical care, the Special Operations Paramedics on this evening set that aside, recognizing that treatment of patients required rescuing them first.

They joined AFD in boats and waded through waist-high water to help rescue residents from homes, trees, roofs and cars, providing critical care along the way.

Division Chief Mikel Kane personally made multiple attempts to rescue those that STAR Flight and other rescue operations could not reach, and he - like the rest of the team - declined to rest until the bulk of rescue operations were complete.

Watershed Protection Flood Early Warning System (FEWS)

Nominated by Wendy Morgan

Before most knew a storm was approaching, the FEWS (Flood Early Warning System) team was tracking its progress, dispatching the first road closure crews beginning the evening of Oct. 30. While no one could have fully anticipated the massive flooding of Onion Creek, the FEWS team had recognized early the need to begin warning the public about the dangers.

The team worked with its PIO staff to begin running emergency radio ads the afternoon of Oct. 30, warning residents about the dangers of low water crossings. This was also the team behind atxfloods.com, which provided updates on the location of active rescues and evacuations. This has quickly become a vital resource for the media during storms where flooding is anticipated.

Ultimately, the FEWS Team logged nearly 36 straight hours at the EOC, beginning Oct. 30, and continued their work well after the initial storm to provide guidance, data and support to the recovery operations.

As one employee noted, “They are heroes and they are there for the City during every single storm.”

Watershed Protection Field Operations

Nominated by Wendy Morgan & Matthew Porcher

In Central Texas, the biggest risk to life during floods occurs at low-water crossings, where drivers often underestimate the depth and force of floodwaters crossing the roadway.

As the storm progressed, Israel Benavides and his Field Operations team were spread throughout the city, monitoring waterways and ultimately closing more than 40 roads throughout Austin to ensure that drivers remained safe.

This team worked throughout the night in torrential rain, reporting conditions to the FEWS team working from the EOC. When U.S. Geological Survey flood gauges failed, this team was critical in reporting the rapidly worsening conditions in the Onion Creek area.

These efforts were complemented with assistance from Austin Police Department and Street and Bridge crews from Public Works, that were also actively diverting traffic and closing flooded and damaged roadways throughout the night.

As one nominator said, “without them...we could have lost many more lives.”



A Halloween. *gift*

Foy Varner & John Lalande

Austin Energy

For over six hours on Oct. 31, Sand Hill Energy Center was literally an island. Sand Hill, the City's newest gas-fueled power plant – located in Del Valle between Onion Creek and the Colorado River – was surrounded by rising floodwaters. The flood had washed out areas along Falwell Lane, making the only road leading out of the plant impassable.

Staff members found themselves trapped at the plant. Some employees who had worked all day were eager to get home for Halloween trick-or-treating with their children; instead, they faced the unhappy prospect of spending the night at the plant. So the shift supervisors for that day, Foy Varner and John Lalande, proposed a solution. As the night-shift supervisor, Varner would park his own truck down the road, as close as he could get it to the plant. Then Lalande would

borrow his truck overnight, taking it to get himself and three of his co-workers – James Holland, Joe Garza, and Jake Spelman – home on Halloween evening. They ventured out on foot and were able to get to Varner's truck.

“John took the three of us to our homes first, in time to enjoy Halloween with our families,” said Spelman. “John put himself last – and by the time he got home, his kids had already gone trick-or-treating.”

The generosity of spirit that Varner and Lalande demonstrated, in making sure their co-workers made it home, allowed the men to get the “treat” of much-needed sleep. They returned to work well-rested the next day to deal with the flood's aftermath.



Keeping Things Running

Behind the scenes, the flooding was testing the capacity of the infrastructure departments that were working to keep utilities running under dire and demanding conditions. Their work required extraordinary teamwork, creativity and cross-departmental partnership.

Austin Energy Electrical Services Division, Information Technology & Control Engineering

*Nominated by Raiyomand Wadia, Alan Claypool
& Matt Richter*

The Austin Energy substation at Onion Creek was under four feet of floodwaters at the peak of the storm, preventing access to power for those affected by the flooding. Critical communications equipment at Sand Hill was also knocked out by the storm.

At the substation, where electrical controls were inundated with water, these crews had to work together to coordinate the wholesale replacement of every electrical component that had been submerged. Working 16-hour shifts for three days, they were able to get the first circuits back up and running. In just over a week, the entire substation was restored and running.

Likewise, every piece of communications equipment was replaced and every network fiber cleaned and tested in the facility to ensure proper operation.

As one nominator noted, “The work and dedication they showed prior to - and during - restoration went far beyond the normal call of duty.”

Austin Energy Longhorn Dam

Nominated by Matthew Russell

Under the best of conditions, management of the 50-year-old Longhorn Dam can be challenging. Controlling the gates that manage flow through the dam requires close coordination with the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) upstream, manually controlling gates - in this case, in the pouring rain and lightning.

Breck Nolen, Norman Almaguer and James Durham had the challenge of managing flood gates during the floods. Working throughout the night, the crew skillfully monitored lake levels and operating the gates while concurrently coordinating with LCRA, Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) and Austin Energy management.

Their work was complicated further when construction barges upstream broke loose and lodged against the dam, threatening permanent damage to the gates. The team coordinated to get the barges safely removed overnight, ultimately controlling flows to more than three feet above their normal levels.

Austin Energy/Austin Water Utility Sand Hill Energy Center & South Austin Water Treatment Plant

Nominated by Donilyn Bishop & Spence Potter

During the height of the storm, employees at the Sand Hill Energy Center and South Austin Water Treatment Plant were trapped in place, with floodwaters right at their doorstep.

Keeping water processing through the plant is vital to prevent overflows that can cause untreated water to enter nearby waterways. So when power failed at the water treatment plant, the Austin Energy and Austin Water employees came together, knowing that additional assistance was unlikely in the short term.

Electricians from Austin Energy joined Austin Water employees to troubleshoot the electrical issues while AWU electrical maintenance workers Andy Nunamaker, J.D. Thompson and Frank Hernandez volunteered to helicopter in to the facility to provide support.

Ultimately, staff was able to keep water flowing through the plant under truly extraordinary circumstances, averting any potential environmental damage that could have come from facility overflows.

Austin Water Utility Electrical Services, Lift Station/Remote Treatment & Construction Rehabilitation Divisions

Nominated by Danny Stephens, Kevin Gayton & John Filipek

In addition to the South Austin Water Treatment Plant, there were multiple plants and lift stations underwater that needed to be repaired and put back in to service quickly. This required the wholesale assessment and replacement of entire components of those facilities to get them running, and the Electrical Services Division stepped up to handle multiple emergencies concurrently.

A credit to the entire team, only three lift stations were lost during the event. By dispatching vac trucks to those locations, crews were able to quickly bypass those stations to allow repairs to be made in a matter of days where many would have expected delays of a week or more.

Austin Water staff were quick to note the “excellent leadership and coordination” involved, noting that this was “certainly a job that deserves to be recognized!”

Austin Water Utility Walnut Creek Water Treatment Plant

Nominated by Paul George

Some forget that the flooding extended well beyond the Onion Creek area. On the opposite end of Austin, personnel at the Walnut Creek Water Treatment Plant were also challenged with managing the heavy rains to prevent overflows at the plant.

The Walnut Creek plant experienced the highest incoming flows in its history with the least amount of infrastructure damage. That credit goes to employees like Scott Butler, Charlotte Schumaker, Charles Stephens and Ivan Tapia, who were not only managing the facility inflows, but also dispatching alarms for nearby package plants and lift stations.

The work of these employees was noted as being “as good as we have had in any flood conditions. Ever.”

Public Works Street & Bridge Operations

Nominated by Molly Ritter

The access road to the Sand Hill Energy Center and the South Austin Water Treatment Plant is Falwell Lane - which, after storm damage, was described as something “in a category by itself.” The Street and Bridge Operations group in Public Works proved up to the task.

Knowing that both employees and private citizens were effectively stranded due to the washout, and critical chemical deliveries were due in just 48 hours, crews from Public Works were on the scene at 1 p.m. on Nov. 1. They worked 10-15 hour shifts throughout the night to not just repair the road, but to replace large sections that were entirely washed away, navigating exposed gas and reclaimed water lines.

By 8 a.m. on Nov. 2, the road was ready to receive heavily loaded delivery trucks that were vital to the plant’s continued operation, showing “the dedication and outside-the-box thinking that takes place when an emergency happens.”



A Neighborhood *angel*

Angel Morin, Jr.

Austin Convention Center Department

On his drive to work early Halloween morning, Angel Morin, Jr. got a frantic call for help from a friend, Bonnie Garza Medel. She lived in his old neighborhood, Onion Creek Plantation; after a night of heavy rain, she could hear sirens and helicopters in the dark and knew the creek was flooding.

“Knowing the neighborhood, I took a back route and got in,” said Morin, who works at Palmer Events Center as a Public Events Supervisor. He helped Bonnie, but as the water began to rise, many other people trapped in their homes were yelling for help.

“As the daylight broke about 7:00, you could see the disaster all around you,” said Morin. No emergency workers were in sight. So Morin, who had completed rescue training as a volunteer firefighter in Buda, waded into the deep waters himself. “My rescue skills just kicked in.”

A crowd of people were standing by watching the swirling floodwaters rise. “They told me, ‘You’re crazy going in there!’” said Angel. “I didn’t want to ask anyone for help, and put them at risk.” But as he set an example, other men followed.

Morin had swum in flooding creeks as a kid and understood how to travel against the powerful current to keep from getting washed away. Still, it was scary. “The water sounded like a train going through. The sound and the sight of it, and how fast the water was rising, made people panic. It looked like it was going 100 miles an hour.”

“I came upon an elderly man and his wife and their disabled child in a wheelchair, trying to get through the water,” he said. “I knew they wouldn’t be able to make it through the water, which was three feet deep.”

Morin helped to get the whole family across. “It was amazing to see them carry that wheelchair over the waters,” said Bonnie Medel.

Morin continued helping other families. He coached them in Spanish, telling them to stay calm and not to panic. “I saw the helicopter picking up people further down, where the water was deeper, but no one was getting to us,” he said.

One family he assisted included a 7-year-old boy, a pregnant woman, and a newborn baby. “I’m 5-foot-6, and the water came up to my shoulders and chest,” he said. He carried the little boy to higher ground on his shoulders. “I had to keep him calm – if he’d panicked, we both would have gone down in that current. I had to ask one of the other men, who was taller, to carry the baby.”

Altogether, Morin and the other men helped about 20 people and their pets get to higher ground. “It never crossed my mind that I was in danger,” said Morin. “What I was worried about was the current dragging people away from me. Thank God I was able to keep everyone calm, and stay in control, until the water stopped rising and slowly went back down.”

The next day, Morin volunteered with the City to help affected residents get and understand information they needed, in English and Spanish. About a week later, he returned to the Onion Creek Plantation neighborhood again, this time to help people clean and begin to repair their homes.

“Angel demonstrated extraordinary efforts in helping our neighbors both during and after the flood,” said Medel, who serves as Vice President of the Onion Creek Plantation Neighborhood Watch Program. “Only a few men dared to put their lives on the line for people they didn’t even know. They are true heroes to each person they saved.”

At the end of April, Morin retired after 25 years with the City. He looks forward to doing more volunteering and even assisting in other emergencies: “I hope God keeps giving me the strength to keep helping people as they need it.”

Recovery in the Field

With hundreds of families left without the most basic of services, departments from throughout the City pulled together to launch cleanup and recovery efforts in the affected neighborhoods, marshaling all of their resources to come together as a seamless team in the field.

Animal Services Office

Nominated by Chris Noble

One of the more challenging aspects of recovery was the retrieval of horses and other large animals that were separated from their owners during the flood. For the Animal Services Office (ASO), it was an unusual challenge that it quickly realized it wasn't fully equipped to handle.

That's when Robert Kollman, a worker in the ASO veterinary clinic, stepped up to the plate. Because of his own experience with horses, he volunteered his own equipment, which proved vital in the rescue efforts. Realizing the challenge of reuniting these animals with their owners, he even went as far as offering his own pasture, stables and food should they be needed.

While Kollman had no direct charge to provide support for flood recovery, he did not hesitate when he realized that he had something to offer - something that not only helped ASO fulfill its mission, but also to help flood victims in a meaningful way.

Austin Energy

Nominated by Jeffrey Sanderson

Working in pairs, Austin Energy employees took on the task of going door-to-door to assess the needs of residents so that volunteers could be efficiently dispatched to assist with cleanup. Realizing that even the smallest gestures were important, one employee would work with the homeowner, while the other would work outside the home to collect and dispose of debris.

John Umphress realized that his working knowledge of construction and building codes could provide valuable assistance in the assessment of needs and provided notable support to these efforts. With time of the essence, these teams were able to quickly identify what kind of work was required, and what authorizations were required to begin the work. This increased the efficiency of recovery efforts, and helped get residents on a path toward re-establishing basic services to their homes.

Building Services Office

Nominated by Dan Dean & Santos Marino

Beyond the sheer number of appliances left outside for collection crews, there was another concern - the refrigerant contained in these appliances. The CFC and HCFC refrigerant chemicals are potent greenhouse gases that must be handled accordingly.

The Building Services team, led by Alan DePalmer, Santos Marino and Nathan Powell, pitched in to help Austin Resource Recovery by retrieving refrigerant from more than 100 appliances received during recovery operations - a truly "dirty job" with appliances full of spoiled food and flood debris.

While the volume of refrigerant may pale in comparison to the total volume of debris removed from the neighborhood, the very real environmental impact does not. These employees played a great part in helping to maintain Austin's environmental sustainability, reaching across departmental lines to provide meaningful assistance.

Austin Police Department 125th/126th Cadet Classes & Training Division

Nominated by Assistant Chief Steve Deaton & Darren Sipes

Like many who assisted in the recovery efforts, the APD cadet classes were eager to see how they could help. That call came from APD Chief Art Acevedo on Nov. 5, when the Chief asked them to help residents with the daunting task of removing flood-damaged items from their homes. In just one day, the cadet classes were able to clear out eight homes for those who were limited due to age, disability or other factors.

The group was also asked to go door-to-door, to help identify needs and connect residents with available resources. While additional cleanup wasn't part of that initial charge, when Officers Xavier Leyva and Luis Cadena came across an elderly couple struggling to clean out their home, they rounded up their fellow training officers and cadets to help.

“These officers recognized people in dire needs and gave their time and effort in making a very hard situation just a little bit easier,” noted one employee. “It was a very selfless act.”

“The team helped residents take the first steps toward repairing their shattered surroundings,” said Assistant Chief Steve Deaton, “and they provided much-needed sense of emotional support for these residents during their time of crisis.”

Austin Police Department Park & Lake Patrol

Nominated by Lt. Arthur Fortune

Throughout APD's response during recovery efforts, there was one unit that was there day-in and day-out: the Park and Lake Patrol. The team provided 24-hour coverage for 16 days straight at the operations center in Onion Creek, as well as the Flood Assistance Center.

By stepping up to fill this gap, the team allowed other APD operational units to continue to focus on their missions across the City, putting their own primary

responsibilities on hold to ensure that there was adequate security for those sheltering at the Dove Springs Recreation Center, and for those concerned about potential theft and unscrupulous contractors in the affected area.

Austin Public Library

Nominated by Anthony Andrews

Sometimes it's the simplest of gestures that made a meaningful impact to residents in flood-affected areas. Timothy Samilpa was one of the hundreds of employee volunteers to respond to the area in the early days of the recovery efforts.

While there was so much important work going on, Samilpa recognized what some residents really needed was someone to talk to. He offered a sympathetic ear, building trust with residents and taking down their concerns, which he would then share with staff at the command center.

Recognizing that many residents who were in need were also concerned about leaving their homes and belongings, Samilpa stepped forward and volunteered to watch over their homes so they could travel to the Flood Assistance Center.





Austin Resource Recovery

Nominated by Jeff Burton, Chris Maldonado, Tiesha Payne, Angela Baker, Bob Gedert, Conley Leloux & Marilyn Brown

The most important and visible step toward recovery was the removal of damaged items and demolition debris from the neighborhood - an effort that ultimately spanned multiple departments and hundreds of employees and volunteers.

Led by Sam Angoori, the team removed more than 4,600 tons of debris, working 12-hour days for two weeks. Faced with many unique and unexpected challenges, team members actively sought out creative solutions - often reaching across to other departments that could assist in the operation.

“Sam’s leadership under trying and unusual times demonstrates his dedication to the citizens of Austin,” said one nominator.

What was notable to many was the absolute respect and professionalism exhibited by the crews. As one nominator noted, “These crews were not laughing, joking or fooling around - they were ‘all business.’ The respect and sensitivity they showed toward affected residents was commendable.”

Employees not regularly in leadership roles stepped up to provide leadership. Crews came together that wouldn’t otherwise work together to get the job done. They did this work while still maintaining regular pickup schedules throughout the City, and they did it all with a perfect safety record.

Family members of several ARR employees noted the long hours away from home, but also were quick to point out the extraordinary joy that their husbands got from helping people in need. “They deserve to be recognized throughout our community for all of their hard work,” noted one family member.

Another nominating employee agreed. “We were able to restore some sense of stability and allow residents to begin focusing on rebuilding their lives...and bring back hope for these families.”

Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services

Nominated by Judy Henry

The combination of weather, flood damage and multiple other factors in an event like this makes public health a critical priority. For Health and Human Services, that started with CASPER - the Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response.

Sherry Lyles and Leslie Mansolo oversaw the field teams that went door-to-door to evaluate critical health threats and both immediate and longer-term needs. The teams, working evenings and weekends, were able to coordinate with the residents and multiple agencies to complete the assessment report just 48 hours after the initial information was collected.

“It is an honor to work with people like Sherry and Leslie. They do their everyday jobs with excellence and rise to an even higher level during times of need,” noted one fellow employee.

Austin Water Utility

Nominated by Francisco Vicent

In the early days of recovery, hundreds of employees stepped out of their regular roles to help residents clean up and clear out their homes. Jasper Carbajal and Rodger Serrano were two of them, helping residents move furniture from houses and distributing informational materials throughout the neighborhood.

Like so many others, they didn’t limit their work to what was asked, going as far as providing transportation for residents who had lost their vehicles so they could get to the Flood Assistance Center and distribution centers along the way.

Code Compliance Department

Nominated by Lauren Taggart, Keith Leach, Ronald Potts, Jonathan Josephson, Debby Hackbarth & Michael McDonald

Code Compliance had an immediate and critical role in helping residents recover. Without timely inspections, any meaningful recovery was on hold for many affected residents. Immediately after the floodwaters subsided, members of the Code Compliance team were on the ground, working to make sense of a chaotic situation, and pulling together to come up with a plan.

In many cases, Code Compliance officers were the first City employees that affected residents had an opportunity to interact with and ask questions. The Code Compliance team welcomed the challenge and worked on each case at a personal level, helping to connect residents with critical services and resources that many times had nothing to do with the physical condition of their homes.

Paul Tomasovic, Ron Potts, Todd Wilcox and Robert Alvarado each worked well over 100 hours in the first 10 days of recovery, overseeing the assessment of more than 1,100 properties. Ultimately, Code Compliance teams secured more than 40 properties that were deemed dangerous.

As one employee noted, “They had more than their mind in the operation, they had their heart in it.”

For Alvarado, that meant putting his bilingual skills to use, stopping in between assessments to provide critical information and guidance to affected residents. Wilcox and many others would help residents move belongings and even deliver food to homes when they could.

Several nominators noted the leadership of Potts and Tomasovic, who managed all Code operations in the field, leading by example and putting the interests and welfare of employees and residents ahead of their own.

“They deserve to be recognized for their acts of kindness and leadership, and we truly appreciate them for who they are and what they have done,” said one employee. “They helped us do our jobs to the best of our ability, so we could help our citizens as much as possible.”

Communications & Technology Management

Nominated by Kerry Coward

With a flood of Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members and City volunteers looking to assist in recovery, it was vital that those resources were coordinated. Working in the background was Ginger Parker, whose expertise with the City’s volunteer management system proved vital in ensuring that volunteers were deployed in areas with the greatest need.

Said one observer, “While a number of people were tracking volunteer information, it was Ginger’s leadership and organizational skills that made her work noteworthy.”

Contract Management Department

Nominated by Samuel Hernandez & Melissa Pool

Even before a call went out to employees to assist in the cleanup efforts, Baldemar Maldonado had spent the weekend in the neighborhood helping families recover. He continued that work through both employee volunteer days, and then beyond that on his own personal time. Employees noted his leadership, serving as an example and finding any way that he might help, whether that was connecting residents with available services, cleaning up a home or simply providing a sympathetic ear.

Said one employee, “Baldemar’s giving spirit seemed inexhaustible. He demonstrated leadership, kindness and generosity, and remained positive and upbeat. He lifted the spirits of everyone around him.”

Fleet Services Office

Nominated by Jennifer Walls

With so many vehicles and so much heavy equipment operating in the area, and operating continuously for days, there was some concern about the time required to take vehicles in for service if they failed. Clearly, time was of the essence, and the loss of any equipment meant critical delays for the teams on the ground.

Michael Powell, a Fleet Service Technician, stepped up and volunteered to remain onsite to service any vehicles right there in the field should they need it.

But rather than waiting for the work to come, Powell took it upon himself to proactively check on all vehicles and equipment working in the field. While he was there to service Austin Resource Recovery units, he also checked on Police, Parks and Recreation, Public Works and Code Compliance vehicles, also checking to ensure that fuel was available for vehicles and generators in the field. At one point, he even pitched in to help the Red Cross with repairs to one of its units.

And when everything was in working condition, Powell kept at it, using any “down time” to walk the neighborhood, assist with cleanup, and provide comfort to residents affected by the flooding.

Said one employee, “Mike exemplifies the ‘P’ in our PRIDE values, and is very deserving of recognition for his efforts.”

Office of Real Estate Services

Nominated by Cindy Garcia & Ronald Olderog

The dedication and compassion that Melanie Montez showed for the affected communities was contagious in her department. After volunteering to assist in the first days of the recovery, Melanie took it upon herself to share her experience with her peers, encouraging them to get involved, and making it a personal mission to get more Spanish speakers into the community to provide support. Putting her own words into action, she spent five days straight in the community, providing information and support to residents. One nominator noted, “She is to be commended for her untiring efforts and genuine caring for those who suffered both materially and emotionally.”

Montez was joined by other members of the ORES team - Tom Balestine, Mahsell Smith, Tina Phifer, Luann Dunn, Melinda Ruby and Jo Gutierrez - who set aside their normal duties to provide assistance and information referrals to affected families. While they didn’t always have the answers, they were able to provide “personal contact, sympathy and kindness at a time of great materials loss and emotional trauma.”

Parks & Recreation Department

Nominated by Melanie Montez, Angela Hanson & Jeff Larsen

Like Public Works, Parks and Recreation was called upon to find ways to assist in debris removal. The maintenance team from Urban Forestry stepped forward to provide its resources within two hours of activation. Using trucks normally used for transporting heavy logs, the crews used their own initiative and creativity to help remove heavily saturated debris from the affected neighborhoods.

Two of the key roles that Parks and Recreation plays in disaster recovery are shelter coordination and donations management. Edward Gonzales and Rick Bocanegra played a large part in helping to distribute donations and supplies on the frontline in the initial days after the storm.

They were noted for their work coordinating with COA staff, neighborhood representatives and volunteers to get critical supplies to those in need. “I was very proud to work alongside them as a fellow employee that weekend,” said one peer.

Julian Salazar, a temporary employee in the department, was also noted for his dedication and work ethic while providing assistance in the field, assisting residents to clear out their homes.

Clearly going above what might be expected of a temporary employee, Salazar exercised his knowledge of operating equipment and went out of his way to get questions answered for the residents he touched along the way. One nominator observed “...the work ethic and dedication that this temporary employee exhibited during a crisis was an inspiration to both our full-time employees and the community we serve.”

Public Works Department

*Nominated by Ronnie Hernandez, Shon Johnson
& Fred Cleveland*

While the Animal Services Office worked to reunite lost horses with their owners, there were - sadly - many animals that did not survive the flood. Stepping well beyond their daily duties in Street and Bridge Operations, Ronnie Hernandez, Carlos De Loera, Shon Johnson, Lawrence Alvarez, Mario Ruiz and Adam Saucedo took on the task of recovering these animals.

Working alongside Travis County personnel, the crew was able to locate and recover multiple animals from private property in the area.

Like the Street and Bridge crews, Sealcoat crews from Public Works also stepped up to assist, providing additional equipment and support for the collection and disposal of flood debris quickly as the larger roll-off containers continued to be filled. Most notably, these crews provided the support while still completing their regular work duties as scheduled, and taking the time to personally connect with and reassure affected residents.

Heavy equipment operators also provided critical support to Austin Resource Recovery debris removal efforts. Because of the size, weight and sheer volume of debris, crews realized that skid-steer loaders could help get trucks loaded more quickly. Shon Johnson, Corey Jackson, Steven Thomas, Theodore Johnson, Donald Ross, Jacob Martinez and Alex Luna worked continuously throughout the debris removal process to help keep debris moving out of the neighborhood.

Transportation Department

Nominated by Samantha Park

Anthony Alvarado and Javier Martinez were two of the hundreds of City volunteers who stepped out of their daily roles to assist in the early days of recovery. Realizing that their bilingual abilities could be valuable, they helped to distribute critical information to residents, and direct them to available resources.

Witnessing how the entire neighborhood came together to help one another, they chose to remain in the field when their work was complete to assist residents in the removal of items from their homes. As one employee noted, "...they went above and beyond their normal duties and it had a profound impact on them both."

Watershed Protection Department

Nominated by Mike Personett & Jose Guerrero

In addition to the human impacts of the flooding, there were significant concerns about the environmental cost that the storm exacted. The Pollution Prevention and Reduction team within Watershed Protection - Thain Maurer, John Watkins, Sharon Cooper, Patrick Kelley, Stan Tindel, Jock Flores, Chris Miller, Rene Avila, Matt Dowd and Ryan He - were immediately dispatched to determine the environmental impact on a stretch of Onion Creek and Boggy Creek that ran from Bluff Springs Road all the way to McKinney Falls.

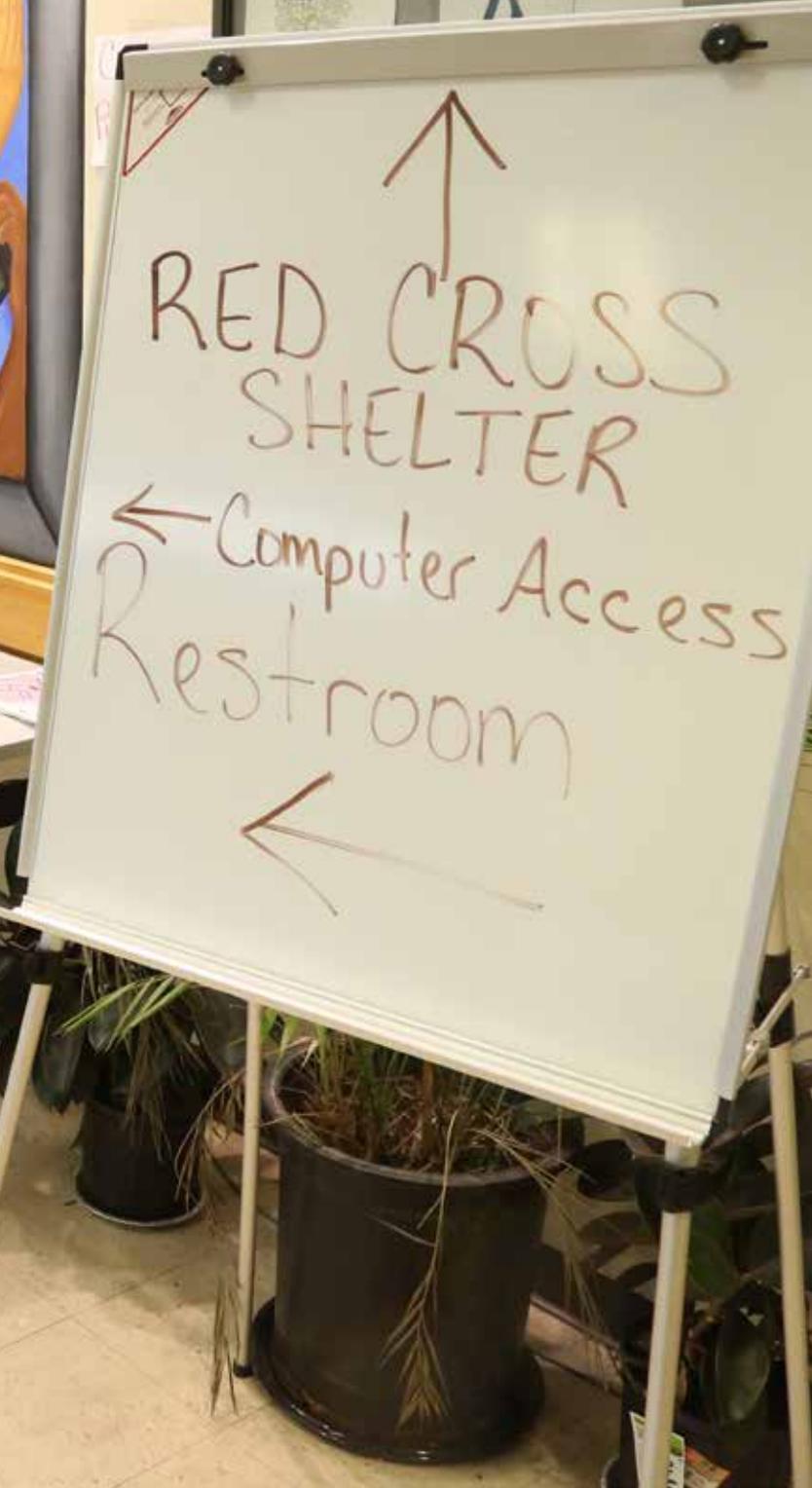
They quickly flagged and mapped the locations of chemical pollutants - unknown drums, paints and petroleum products deposited in or near the creek banks and worked with residents to evaluate concerns about unknown containers that may have washed onto their properties. While in the field, they also assisted in the location of livestock for removal.

Once mapped and identified, the crew then began the arduous and often tedious task of removing these potential pollutants from creeks and greenways.

For the Field Operations team, the task was equally daunting. In the two months after the storm, the team responded to more than 1,000 service requests - the equivalent of six months worth of calls in a normal year. Ultimately its work spanned multiple teams, beginning with 3-1-1 dispatch and continuing through to the TV Inspection, Investigations, Open Waterway Maintenance, and Inspection and Cleaning crews. They maintained flexibility and a positive spirit throughout the response - cleaning from home sites, creeks, lakes and storm drains.

"Responding to such a large volume of calls in such a short amount of time on top of the daily calls for service was remarkable," said one observer.





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The Flood Assistance Center

What started as a few tents and a shelter at the Dove Springs Recreation Center soon grew to a full complex of social service providers, counselors and remote services to help support those who had lost everything in the floods.

Austin 3-1-1

Nominated by Angela Tolle, Gertrude West & Pamela Jones

The team from Austin 3-1-1 was on the front lines as affected residents made their way to the FAC for resources and guidance. In fact, the first people most families encountered were from 3-1-1, serving as a triage desk to provide basic information and referral to other service providers.

The team also quickly recognized the need for translators, and made resources available to assist any resident who needed them. Debbie Medina was one of the employees who actively and enthusiastically offered her bilingual skills to help. “You could always count on Debbie, no matter what time or day it was. She always said ‘yes.’ She is awesome and always willing to go the extra mile,” said one nominator.

Their flexibility and ability to adapt to changing circumstances was critical in identifying issues and available resources, and keeping people engaged and informed across a wide variety of needs. Said another, “People coming in were often (understandably) confused and upset, and the staff from 3-1-1 was always calm, professional and sympathetic.”

Austin Energy Customer Care

Nominated by Carla Sisco & Scott Kline

As residents worked to recover, there were many questions to be answered. People wanted to know how to get power restored in homes, they had utility bill questions and concerns, and many times did not know about available products and services that might provide assistance.

The Customer Care team was on site to provide answers to those questions, and to do its best to alleviate additional stress whenever possible.

Rachel Solis didn’t let her role prevent her from actively reaching out to other departments to provide for residents’ needs outside of utility concerns, putting her network and experience as Contact Center Lead to use to benefit the victims. She was one of the first to step forward to work at the FAC, shifting her work schedule whenever she could.

Like Solis, Viridiana Quiroga and Edward Aguilar also stepped forward to serve at the FAC. The entire team was patient, resourceful and creative in helping residents navigate utility issues, and played a large part in helping them get on a path toward recovery.

Austin Energy Customer Energy Solutions

Nominated by Joe Guerrero & Steve Saenz

David Rubalcava was working with Austin Energy in a temporary position when he was called upon to provide technical assistance for residents, providing information on weatherization and energy efficiency. But that role quickly expanded when Rubalcava saw the opportunity to extend his help.

As a bilingual employee, David used any free time he had to assist other departments with translation needs, and stayed well in to the evening to ensure that someone was available for residents to talk to. When he was done, he often took personal time to assist families, even offering up his personal truck to help with cleanup.

“David is not only a good worker, he is truly a good person,” said one fellow employee.

Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services

Nominated by Lisa Sepulveda

While EMS is typically focused on daily emergency calls, leadership at the department recognized the need for longer-term attention toward flood victims. Chief Ernie Rodriguez, Chief of Staff James Shamard, Commander Andrew Hofmeister, Captain Sam Latta and Paramedic Jason Castleberry spent weeks at the EOC and the FAC, assisting with relief efforts.

It was important to the team that it visit the affected residents to ensure that their needs were provided for, and to simply provide a reassuring presence in a time of need.

Noted one employee, “Their kindness and compassion was felt by the entire community, and they never sought any credit for their efforts.”

Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services

*Nominated by Richard Waite, Chris Crookham,
Ricardo Zavala, Coleen Christian & Yvonne Meyer*

You might describe the Health and Human Services (HHSD) team as the “Swiss Army Knife” in the flood recovery efforts. The team - Chris Crookham, Robert Gibson, Vella Karman, Stephanie Connell, Erika Cenicerros, Stephanie Eaton, Abraham Wall, Lucio Meza and Jesse Hernandez - served as case managers for victims of the flood, providing wraparound consultation and direction toward recovery services. That included everything from housing, clothing, utilities, replacement identification and referrals to social service agencies.

Noted one fellow employee, “...this group acted with unwavering compassion and unconditional positive regard. [They had] cool heads in a stressful situation.”

Lucio Meza was one of the only bilingual caseworkers and received a heavy load as a result. Fellow employees were impressed with the way he got to know the clients and understand their hardships. One of the first to recognize that working traditional hours wouldn't be

helpful to many of the residents, he took the lead in reconfiguring his own hours. Meza began arriving at the FAC at 6:30 a.m. for those who couldn't be there during the work day. He then worked on their cases while they were at work. “If Lucio had not taken these selfless actions, many of those clients may still be without housing,” said one team member.

Ricky Waite's everyday job doesn't include social work or case management, but he filled that role every day for nearly three straight weeks during the recovery efforts. Fellow employees noted that he was often there well before most others, and stayed well after most had left for the day. He took the time to guide his peers through the forms and social work protocols, and was always willing to take on additional cases if others were unable to be at the FAC. Added one fellow employee, “He did it all without complaint, reprioritizing his time from work stacking up at the office in order to be there for those in need.”

“Ricky poured his heart into making sure that the victims who needed his help received it quickly and with a smile...exhibiting actions that not only highlight our PRIDE values, but also our commitment to being the best-managed city in the country,” noted one peer.

Stephanie Hayden had the responsibility for coordinating HHSD efforts across multiple functions and outside agencies from the first day of the FAC to the last. She also took the lead in attending evening community meetings to help connect residents with caseworkers.

Hayden was noted in particular for her “extraordinary leadership,” pulling together multiple functions that don't regularly work together in to a coordinated and seamless operation.

While case work was continuing, a separate HHSD team was working to help residents remain healthy during recovery. In addition to the health concerns related to the flooding itself, the combination of wet conditions and falling temperatures increased health risks. Sylvia Herrera, Elizabeth Flagg, Kathy Cavin, Tanya Roland, John Grogan, Maria Mata, Irma Reyna, Cris Valenzuela, Josie Govea and Margaret Monreal were set up and ready to serve at the FAC in a matter of hours, providing hundreds of essential immunizations at the FAC. This was while maintaining regular service at other clinics throughout the county.

Building Services Office

Nominated by Dan Dean

Restoring basic needs and dignity can sometimes be as simple as providing access to a hot shower. When the call came, Kevin Huff and Mike Salinas were called upon to make it happen, delivering shower trailers to the affected area.

The pair used their creativity and resourcefulness to connect the trailers when faced with issues accessing electrical and water service, running temporary water and drain lines to the shower trailers to ensure that they were not only serviceable, but also met all the necessary code and sanitary requirements.

From that time on, the department established a rotation for staffing the facility. Employees who volunteered for the additional duty would complete their day's responsibilities, then weather cold and rain to ensure that the facilities were clean and maintained for residents.

Communications & Technology Management

Nominated by Stephen Elkins, Kimberly McNeely, James Shamard, Mike Elliott, Sabine Romero, Michael Maddux, Jasper Brown, Jack Bray, Angela Tolle, Robert Turner,

Anyone who spent time at the FAC surely ran in to Paul Hopingardner and Robert Turner, who were seemingly onsite 24 hours-a-day. The two served varying roles throughout - sometimes serving as the onsite incident commander and other times as an individual contributor, filling in wherever they were needed.

Their knowledge of incident command proved instrumental to the success of the FAC, consistently demonstrating a "steady and calm leadership style that allowed the team to be both deliberate and impactful." This was particularly notable, considering that neither had served in this particular type of role before, yet "they performed flawlessly and tirelessly," as one nominator noted.

"These two assisted in a manner well beyond the scope of any technology job description. They simply made caring a priority."

Another near-constant presence at the FAC was Chad Didion. He had the seemingly straightforward task of setting up a few laptops and a printer at the FAC for those providing support services. But over the next three weeks, that responsibility grew to encompass nearly 20 laptops and multiple printers spread throughout several tents and the recreation center itself. That included setup and networking for offsite permitting and support for other non-City groups providing assistance to flood victims, "and he always had an extremely positive attitude and a smile on his face."

Didion reported to the FAC every day for three weeks, logging nearly 80 hours in the first week alone. And when he saw additional needs, he took it upon himself to act, whether it was setting up a phone-charging station for visitors to the FAC or troubleshooting technical issues for a partner agency.

One nominator put it best, "What Chad did was not just his job, but whatever needed to be done. He gave more than 100 percent of himself."

Homeland Security & Emergency Management

Nominated by Meredith Gray

While most of the HSEM staff members were coordinating activities on a larger scale from the EOC, Donny Cummings hit the ground at the FAC to help. He logged 18-hour days for several days straight as the scope and scale of operations at the FAC grew from a few tables to include dozens of government, non-profit and support agencies. Cummings was instrumental to providing a daily evaluation of groups providing services that day - which were arriving, which were leaving, and which were on their way. He also helped to coordinate the staging of services and meals, working with the American Red Cross on ways to best streamline and route the assistance process on-site. "He was an incredible asset to the City throughout the disaster," noted one of his peers.

Neighborhood Housing & Community Development

Nominated by Edie Merla & Sherry Cardino

One of the critical elements of recovery for residents was the restoration of basic needs - especially housing. With so many unable to return to their homes, Neighborhood Housing and Community Development (NHCD) used every resource at its disposal to help find homes for those in need. At the center of that effort was Diana Domeracki, who cut her vacation short and immediately put "all hands on deck" at the FAC to help - working alongside her team to coordinate with residents and local property managers to house flood victims.

For Domeracki, it was not enough to simply organize the effort - she was personally involved alongside employees getting the work done. "Her positive attitude and willingness to work every aspect of the emergency made for a win-win for everyone involved," said one fellow employee.

Susan Kinel was part of Domeracki's team at the FAC, noted for her excellent personal and professional expertise in housing. It was her approach toward working with displaced residents that was particularly notable to those working with her, though, with one noting, "her integrity, kindness and compassion made her an excellent human face to manage such an overwhelming task."

Parks & Recreation Department

Nominated by Kevin Gomillion, Merv Griffin, Courtney Crayton, Pat Fuller, Kimberly McNeely, James Shamard, Kim McKnight & Jose Benitez

The team at Dove Springs Recreation Center was thrust in to largely unfamiliar territory it was asked to host the Flood Assistance Center and emergency shelter for victims of the flood. Even so, the team at Dove Springs exceeded expectations by every account.

Led by division manager Patrick Corona and center supervisor D'Wayne Anderson, every member of the staff stepped up to ensure that residents were welcomed and provided for at the center. Anderson was particularly committed, working at the center every day that it was open, and working tirelessly with departments and outside agencies to coordinate their presence onsite.

One nominator gave this glowing observation: "Mr. Anderson is an awesome example of what the City of Austin stands for - what makes it one of the 'best-managed cities.' He met and exceeded expectations to provide refuge, hope and shelter to those that needed it most."

Corona coordinated shelter efforts from the very beginning and continued to be flexible as the complexity and scope of services expanded at the FAC. That required working with staff to provide 24-hour supervision of the site, providing meals and supplies prior to Incident Command System mobilization, preparing meals for Incident Command, and arranging for the needs of other recovery organizations onsite.

“Patrick’s leadership and commitment to the community provides motivation to his team to be accommodating and caring. I’m proud to work alongside this team,” said one of his peers.

Alex Serna was one of the first people many encountered at the FAC, providing parking and other information as they arrived. “His welcoming attitude brought smiles to faces that you could tell had been filled with tears,” said one employee, noting that his ability to speak Spanish helped people feel comfortable and understand the process.

Two others that were seen nearly every day at the center were PARD Director Sara Hensley and Assistant Direction Kimberly McNeely.

McNeely managed PARD activities at the site, and was frequently seen there long before and long after most had left - often identifiable by her ubiquitous headband. She was particularly noted for her compassionate ability to make those seeking shelter welcome and comfortable. Hensley provided management coordination of the entire FAC, embracing the use of the Incident Command System to work across departmental boundaries and ensuring that the facility played a significant role in the safety and recovery for residents.

“Kim’s positive and helpful attitude was contagious in a very depressing environment. we need more like her,” said one employee. Another noted that she was, “...not simply a figurehead, but took an active role, taking other assignments when no one else stepped up to do so. I’m proud to say that she’s part of our team.”

Inside the center, Vanessa Velez was assisting in shelter operations, providing activities and programs for the children of those affected. Velez was selflessly dedicated, even bringing in her own toys for the children “just to see the smile on their faces.”

“She treated everyone like family and watched over the children as if they were her own. Everything she did was from the heart without ever asking for anything in return,” said a fellow employee.

One nominator put it well: “When it comes to helping people, Parks and Recreation comes through for the residents of Austin, because we take pride in what we do.”

Planning & Development Review

Nominated by Cande Coward, Angelo Perez & Greg Guernsey

As the scope of needs in the affected areas became more evident, staff realized that there was a critical need to streamline the permitting process to help residents get back in to their homes. The PDR Permit Center staff proved up to the task, creating a satellite permit center onsite for residents that would otherwise have had challenges getting to and from the department’s main office at One Texas Center.

Short-staffed prior to the event, the team was still able to efficiently process permits onsite and maintain customer service for the day-to-day needs at One Texas Center. Noted one employee, “...staff worked very hard, and were sincere and dedicated toward their responsibility” throughout the event.

Sylvia Benevidez and Keith Batcher were two of the Permit Center staff, noted for their patience, care and understanding in handling the needs of residents. One of their peers pointed out “...the personal effort they put in to help residents obtain permits the correct way, giving them one less thing to worry about. They put personal time and effort to go above and beyond” in providing service.

Serving dual roles at the remote permit center and in the field were the Building Inspections staff - Tony Hernandez, Julian Laney, Dee Ann Afra, Mark Hill, Douglas Williams, Julio Molis, Wes Buckner and David Brasich. Often times working between permitting and code compliance, this team was required to evaluate homes and - at times - make difficult decisions regarding removal and reconstruction of property.

The team worked weekends and evenings to ensure that staff was available to answer questions, and were always available to both staff and residents. “If they were asked if they went above and beyond, they would say ‘no.’ That’s part of what makes this team so remarkable. I consider it a pleasure and an honor to be able to work with these professionals every day,” said one fellow employee.

Transportation Department

Nominated by Samantha Park

Anthony Alvarado and Javier Martinez were two of the hundreds of City volunteers who stepped out of their daily roles to assist in the early days of recovery. Realizing that their bilingual abilities could be valuable, they helped to distribute critical information to residents and direct them to available resources.

Witnessing how the entire neighborhood came together to help one another, they chose to remain in the field when their work was complete to assist residents in the removal of items from their homes. As one employee noted, "...they went above and beyond their normal duties and it had a profound impact on them both."

Watershed Protection Department

Nominated by Jay Baker, Wendy Morgan, Katie Pfeil, Jose Guerrero & Matthew Porcher

While WPD field crews were cleaning up in the affected areas, another team was working from the FAC, providing critical guidance on rebuilding, buyout programs and the "how" of getting their homes back in livable condition based on floodplain restrictions.

The team - Kevin Shunk, Kevin Autry, Henry Price, Katrina Bohrer, David Marquez and Jameson Courtney - was immediately thrown in to the front lines, setting up a makeshift field permitting office almost immediately to help residents navigate the path toward recovery. During their time at the FAC, they provided guidance for more than 700 people seeking information on how to rebuild.

Their work was complicated by the myriad of rules for building in the flood plain - rules that they had little direct control over. As a result, they often found themselves in the difficult position of providing both comfort and less-than-desirable news to property owners. The work required an adept balance of empathy, creativity, caring and resolve that extended them well beyond the normal demands of the job.

"They always delivered their help with compassion, warmth, expertise and professionalism. I'm extremely impressed with how they handled it, and am honored to work with them," said one fellow employee.

Marquez was noted for his role in those efforts, not only providing the technical guidance, but listening and empathizing with those affected. Knowing that the code and regulations can be challenging, the human touch was important. "He has that type of compassion which is valuable in the City regulatory environment."

Shunk, the supervisor for the FEWS and Floodplain Management teams, stepped forward to meet with neighborhood leaders and residents to provide guidance and information on how to navigate the process.

Alongside the permit team, another group was working tirelessly to find a way to accelerate the buyout process for eligible homes. Mapi Vigil, Andrea Bostrom and Pam Kearfott were given the daunting task of organizing the unprecedented concurrent buyout for 116 homes in the affected area. The level of detail and work that goes in to a single buyout is extensive, and they were now trying to coordinate dozens at a time.

The team immediately dove in to the complex process of evaluating data, scheduling appraisals, and working through the complexities related to each property (liens, title issues, mortgage companies). And the outcomes have been extraordinary. Work that is normally evaluated and prioritized over a five-year cycle was compressed to months, with the first closings occurring in April.

"The time, focus and dedication that has been required to make this successful is tremendous," said one fellow employee. All the while, the team has been concurrently handling media interviews along the way, dealing with contractors, securing vacant homes and ensuring that they're safe. "To know that we're helping to get residents out of harm's way is a rewarding feeling, and it wouldn't be possible without their extraordinary work and dedication."



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Cassidy Villegan

Small & Minority Business Resources Department

As Cassidy Villegan viewed Facebook photos posted of the extreme Halloween flooding in Southeast Austin, he recognized old friends on top of their houses, awaiting rescue. A graduate of Johnston High School and St. Edward's University who'd been part of the Southeast Austin community for 24 years, he'd had many friends who lived in the Onion Creek floodplain area. "It really hit home," he said.

Over the next few days, Villegan volunteered to help the City distribute information to flood victims. He saw a destroyed house that had been pierced by a huge tree – and discovered that the woman who lived there was the cousin of a close friend (City employee Marcus Taylor). Villegan, a triathlete and avid volleyball player who had recently played in a charity tournament, began to think about a fundraiser.

He talked with Josh Bumb, a fellow Johnston alum, and his business partner Richard Veregge, the co-owners of Moontower Saloon. (They had recently held a benefit for injured cyclist and AFD Firefighter Colin Camp.) Villegan offered to organize a charity volleyball tournament, as part of a hosting a larger "Day of Giving" at Moontower on Nov. 17.

Villegan created a Facebook event on Nov. 6 announcing the tournament, and sent it to friends and volleyball players he knew. "The outpouring of response was tremendous," he said. "Within five days, we had filled all 48 player slots and had a waiting list. Many players had only lived in Austin for a few years, and they didn't know anyone in that area, but they were eager to help." Each player contributed at least \$20 and promoted the Facebook event.

Meanwhile, Moontower involved about 20 other small and locally owned businesses. The Day of Giving on Nov. 17 – which kicked off with the volleyball tournament, and included a raffle, live music, Salt Lick BBQ and other food – drew a huge crowd. The volleyball tournament raised more than \$1,150. Altogether, the event raised more than \$10,000 for the Austin Disaster Relief Network, which had established a Central Texas Flood Relief Fund. "It was a huge day!" said Villegan.

He continues to help flood victims get the help they need, in his City job as a Business Development Counselor with Small and Minority Business Resources. Due to the interest and caring he demonstrated, Villegan was designated to expedite all SMBR reviews of City contracts created in response to the Onion Creek floods. "I've been ensuring that SMBR reviews are fast-tracked, to ensure the City's overall response is as timely as possible," he explained. "It's still ongoing." In April, Villegan was assisting with contracts for the purchase of Onion Creek flood plain homes, as part of the city's buy-out effort.

"I felt extremely proud of the Austin community, and primarily Southwest and Southeast Austinites, who came together to raise all that money in less than 24 hours," Villegan said. "It was a great collaboration of individuals and small local businesses. It was wonderful – I just felt humbled, excited and appreciative to be part of something much larger than myself."

Behind the Scenes

Throughout the City's response, there were countless people working behind the scenes, supporting the recovery activities or providing assistance and support to their community and co-workers on their own time.

Austin Energy

Nominated by Carolyn Wright & John Trowbridge

The Electric Service Delivery group within Austin Energy took it upon themselves to step forward to do what they could to assist in the aftermath of the storm, banding together to set up a donation drive that raised more than \$300 for the purchase of much-needed bedding, clothes, tools, gloves and other items for flood victims. They saw it not only as an opportunity to help those in need, but an opportunity for the team to pull together for a common cause, exhibiting what one employee called “personal kindness to help those in need at such a tragic moment.”

Jeffrey Sanderson from the Consumer Energy Solutions group lives in the area and considered himself blessed to come out unscathed. Realizing his good fortune, and feeling compelled to assist his neighbors, Sanderson volunteered his time and worked with his children's youth football league to donate a truck load of clothes and personal items for the affected residents.

Austin Police Department

Nominated by John Bradshaw & Steve Deaton

Like the ESD group in Austin Energy, the APD Communications team wanted to do more. Having been on the front line of the initial dispatch and response to the floods, the team had a personal connection to the event. Mara Daly and Cynthia Rivera decided to take the lead, organizing a donation effort and personally delivering donations of food, clothes and cleaning supplies to the Flood Assistance Center.

For some, the effects of the flood were even more personal. Officer Sophia Loera and her partner were directly impacted by the floods and unable to return home. Upon learning of her situation, Assistant Chief Jessica Robledo took it upon herself to help the officer find temporary housing and reached out to Cops for Charity, which provided Loera with a cell phone and gift card to purchase new clothing.

“Though her duties already required long hours, nights and weekends, [Robledo] made it a priority to be available to assist this family and others at all hours. It's an honor to nominate her for recognition of her exemplary service,” said one employee.

Austin Public Library

Nominated by Nancy Mendieta

Nancy Mendieta was one of several City employees whose families were directly impacted by the flooding in Onion Creek. Her son and his family lost nearly everything in the storm, riding out the cresting waters on the roof of their home.



Learning of their situation, her colleagues at the library immediately stepped in to help. The next day, Roy LaFuente was at their home to help, first towing their truck and then helping repair it. Others (Joye Pangelian, Evelyn Haywood, Patricia Mendoza, St. John Requejo) pitched in with donations, including a car seat, diapers, gift cards, clothing and personal items for the young family.

When Mendieta set out to organize a fundraiser for her son's family, Joe and Melissa Rodriguez, Oscar Franco and Alma Long provided donations, food and food warmers for the event.

It was a true example of the APL "family" pulling together to assist one of their own. Noted Mendieta, "This is truly something that will never be forgotten, and I'm truly and deeply grateful to each of my brothers and sisters of the City that came and stood with me and my family."

Austin/Travis County Health & Human Services

Nominated by Hermelinda Zamarripa

Ricardo Zavala was raised in Dove Springs, and continues to serve young people in the 78744 ZIP code. The moment he learned of the floods, Zavala took action to find any way that he might help. For weeks afterward, he was a constant presence in the community. Noted one observer, "Whenever I was there, I could count on seeing Ricardo. It's like he never left the place."

He took his own time to knock on as many doors as he could, asking families what they needed, then making sure that their needs were met. Using his personal relationships in and with the community, he was able to recruit additional volunteers to help with cleanup.

He was often seen at the relief tent on Quicksilver Drive, seeking the next opportunity to help - sometimes putting in 15 or more hours a day, doing anything that needed to be done. And throughout it all, "he remained happy, smiling and upbeat."

Communications & Public Information

Nominated by Marion Sanchez, Reyne Telles, Doug Matthews, Matthew Porcher & Michael McDonald

Both within and outside of the department, the "PIO Net" pulled together during this event like no time in the past. Dozens of public information personnel from multiple departments set aside their normal duties to staff shifts at the EOC and at the FAC, often into the evenings and over multiple weekends.

"While many did not work together on a daily basis, everyone seamlessly adapted and filled in across roles and departments," said one employee.

CPIO employees Kyle Carvell and Marion Sanchez were specifically called out for their efforts during response and recovery.

Carvell worked multiple shifts at the EOC, and has always been dedicated during an activation, often picking up the late and overnight shifts that others might be unavailable to cover. When someone was needed to host media on-site the day after the floods, he was there. When there were gaps in weekend coverage, he stepped up. Even when overnight operations ended at the EOC, Carvell volunteered to take the radio home to be the overnight PIO on-call. "His willing and calm demeanor is always appreciated during the chaos of an activation. He volunteers to take the shifts that no one really wants and is often praised by reporters for the speed in which he's able to get information to them during emergencies," said one member of the PIO Net.

Sanchez took it upon herself to travel out to the affected area when she learned of a meeting being planned by residents in the aftermath of the floods. With very little information to share at that point, she was still able to work with residents, listen sympathetically to their concerns, and provide some comfort and confidence while plans were made for a more thorough meeting later that week. Afterward, Sanchez continued to stay engaged, in particular with the Spanish-speaking community to provide information and personally to provide comfort to those that were affected.

“Marion’s connections and relationships with the community were a vital resource for us during our response. Her compassion and dedication to helping residents is second-to-none,” said one of her peers.

Wendy Morgan in Watershed Protection was another on the front lines throughout the response, always handling the media with professionalism and a positive demeanor despite the stress of the situation. Along the way, she always found time to contribute in other ways between calls. “When her co-workers needed support, she was there for them. She’s one of the City of Austin’s best employees.”

Controller’s Office

Nominated by Diana Thomas

One of the most critical - and yet unheralded - roles in emergency response is the tracking of pay and expenditures related to emergency response. This is vitally important, as only accurate and thorough recordkeeping can ensure reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Joyce Herring was the lead in pulling together all of the relevant data to support those costs as the event unfolded.

Herring took the initiative to meet individually with departments throughout the response to help them appropriately track their eligible expenses, and worked with HSEM to exhaustively review the numbers to ensure accuracy, and that all eligible expenses were accounted for. As a result of her efforts, Travis County and the City of Austin have already received \$730,000 from FEMA to support the response and recovery efforts.

Noted one employee, “Her dedication to ensuring that we move through the process smoothly is greatly appreciated.”

Public Safety Executive Leadership

Nominated by Michael McDonald

While a number of executives are mentioned throughout this publication, several were noted for their dedication behind the scenes, providing leadership and keeping both City management and elected leaders advised of the changing conditions on the ground.

Otis Latin (HSEM), Carl Smart (Code Compliance), Art Acevedo (APD), Rhoda Mae Kerr (AFD), Ernie Rodriguez (ATC/EMS), James Shamard (ATC/EMS) and Scott Swearengin (HSEM) were a constant presence both in the field and working behind the scenes to coordinate critical response activities, resolve challenges and clear the way for employees to do their best work.

“The amount of work these individuals shouldered was over and above their day-to-day public safety duties across the City, which they still accomplished despite the long hours and complex problems they were facing.”

Public Works Department

Nominated by Brett Clemons

John Bowman is no stranger to disaster recovery. In fact, he has volunteered his time not only in Austin but around the world to help communities recover from disasters. So it was only natural that Bowman volunteered significant personal time during the days and weeks after the flood to assist with cleanup and providing guidance to those seeking help.

A fellow employee offered this observation of Bowman’s untiring efforts: “He seeks no validation for his work, but instead treats it like it is his duty to do so. The world is a better place thanks to people like John.”

Thank you

While this publication focuses on the efforts of City of Austin employees, there were dozens of groups and organizations that stepped forward in the days and weeks following the floods to provide comfort, supplies, support and resources. We thank all of our partners for their help in restoring the lives of those affected by the floods, and for all of the individuals who have provided support.

Austin Mayor and City Council	Dove Springs Proud	Saint Vincent de Paul Store
Adventist Community Services	Family Eldercare	Salvation Army
AIDS Services of Austin	Foundation Communities	Samaritan's Purse
AISD/Project Help	Foundation for the Homeless	Sendero Health Plans
American Red Cross	Front Steps	Southern Baptist Disaster Relief
AmeriCorps/ Texas Conservation Corps	Goodwill Industries	State Rep. Eddie Rodriguez
Any Baby Can	H.A.N.D. (Helping the Aged, Needy and Disabled)	State Rep. Paul Workman
Arc of the Capital Area	Habitat for Humanity	State Senator Kirk Watson
Austin Area Urban League	Interfaith Action of Central Texas	Texas Baptist Men
Austin Community Emergency Response Team	Latino Healthcare Forum	Texas Baptists Disaster Recovery
Austin Disaster Relief Network	Legal Aid	Texas Builders Foundation
Austin Tenants Council	LifeWorks	Texas Department of Public Safety
Austin/Travis County Integral Care	Lions Club	Texas Division of Emergency Management
Bastrop County Long-Term Recovery	Meals on Wheels and More	Texas Gas Service
Billy Graham Ministries	One Star Foundation	Texas Office of Vital Records
Capital Area Food Bank	Perez Elementary School	Travis County Government
Caritas	Rapid Response Chaplains	United Way of Greater Austin
Catholic Charities of Central Texas	Reach Out America	United Methodist Church/ Austin District
City of Round Rock	Rio Grande Volunteer Legal Services	VOAD Central Texas (Volunteer Organization Active in Disaster)
Community Care Clinics	River City Youth Foundation	Volunteer Legal Services
Crossroads Christian House of Prayer	SafePlace	
Dove Springs Neighborhood Association		



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