CNS /Update Newsletter Feature

North Central Florida Hurricane Awareness Day

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A plane that survived flying through the eyes of hurricanes was the catalyst which brought together emergency-relief agencies in Alachua County. On March 26-27, a WC-130 out of Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Mississippi, was the centerpiece of the first North Central Florida Hurricane Response Exhibition. The exhibition, held at Flightline (located at the Gainesville Regional Airport), drew approximately 6,000 people, including about 600 school children.

Left, A WC-130 was the centerpiece of Hurricane Awareness Day, which brought together emergency-relief agencies from around Alachua County.

Below, NERDC Receptionist Joella Walz prints out digital pictures of Lincoln Middle School students who posed with the hurricane plane.

Students listen as Scott Denham, Dropsponde
Operator, explains how the hurricane plane's crew collects data from hurricanes by flying through the eyes of the sometimes massive storms.

NERDC played a major role in sponsoring the event, along with the University of Florida Air Force ROTC and the City of Gainesville.

NERDC Associate Director Marie Dence said participating in events like these benefit the data center. "An event like this teaches us about the resources that are available for hurricane and disaster response. That gives us an opportunity to work in a non-crisis mode with the personnel at disaster response agencies with whom we might need to work some day if we are unfortunate enough to experience a disaster," Dence said.

Because of the massive amounts of data that run through NERDC's system on a daily basis, the data center is actively involved in disaster-planning. NERDC takes a proactive approach to getting ready for "the big one"-whether the disaster is a hurricane, fire, or other unexpected catastrophe.

Says NERDC Project Development Manager Allan Pither, who spearheaded the event, "UF AFROTC coordinated the aircraft. It's one thing to have a neat idea, but they're the ones who made it happen."

Pither said the reason behind having a hurricane plane displayed in Gainesville is that it helps us to maintain a regional vision, which will, in turn, help us to protect NERDC's data. And why a hurricane plane? "That's the source of the most accurate and timely data that can be obtained from a hurricane," Pither said.

And while the event was informative, it also featured fun exhibitions: Gainesville Regional Utilities bucket-truck rides; helicopters from the Alachua County Sheriff's Office, Gainesville Police Department, and the 7th District Coast Guard; search and rescue dogs, patrol horses, a fire engine, and others.

Next year's event will be coordinated by the local Red Cross. Dence said that NERDC will be happy to participate as appropriate.

Your Comments are Welcome

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