

HURRICANE AID

Former Jefferson City residents made it through Hurricane Irma in Florida. Locally, a donation drive sponsored by area churches just wrapped up.

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- By Phillip Sitter phillip@newstribune.com

“Everybody’s OK” is the news about former Jefferson City residents who found themselves in the turmoil of Hurricane Irma — though OK looks very different for one resident on the hard-hit Caribbean island of St. Thomas than it does for others in Florida.

Mark Pulliam rode out Irma in his Daytona Beach home with his fiancée and eldest son. He described the worst parts of the experience as minor inconveniences.

“The worst part of going through a hurricane for us is boarding up all of the windows and not getting any light inside the house,” Pulliam said.

He used to own a tattoo shop in Jefferson City and now is the operations director for a private marina.

Pulliam said Wednesday the marina still doesn’t have power, but the concrete docks seem to have escaped damage. His own home had power restored early Tuesday morning, after losing it at about 10 p.m. Sunday.

The family had a generator, so even in the blackout they were able to run TVs, the refrigerator, fans and the coffee pot — everything except air conditioning, he said.

He said he and his 21-year-old son, Jake, went outside during the storm a couple times to make sure no debris had blown into their yard that could be picked up again to cause damage later. Pulliam said winds were sustained at 85 miles per hour for about 10 hours, though a city official told him that for about 10 minutes gauges clocked 105 miles per hour.

Mark’s home didn’t sustain any damage; shortly before the News Tribune called Wednesday, he had just finished clearing their swimming pool of shingles and tree branches.

As of about 12:30 p.m. CDT Wednesday, power was still out for the family’s neighbors across the street, and storm surge flooding about a quarter of a mile away had put 4 feet of water in other homes.

On the other side of Florida in Cape Coral, Bryan and Lea Ann Deatherage’s home made it through Irma unscathed, too, according to Bryan’s mom, Carmen, of Jefferson City.

Jefferson City natives who first moved to Florida in 2009, Bryan and Lea Ann returned to Florida last year after nine years back in Jefferson City.

Carmen said the family had returned home to Cape Coral on Tuesday from Disney World, where they had evacuated to a resort Saturday.

It was hot at home without air conditioning, but Carmen said the power came back on at about 7 p.m. Tuesday, and Lea Ann was back at work Wednesday.

She and Bryan live in the former home of her brother, Alan Bray, who now lives on the U.S. Virgin Island of St. Thomas with his wife, Tracy.

The Brays and their home are OK, as well, though their island was devastated by Irma, which struck there as the most powerful Atlantic Ocean hurricane in recorded history.

Sibling Ralph Bray — who is the recorder of deeds for Cole County — said “communication has been very spotty.” He added his brother is very frustrated by that and the lack of supplies in the storm’s aftermath.

Alan had sent him a message after Irma passed, asking the location of Hurricane Jose. Alan also called him another time to ask about the status of the airport on St. Thomas.

The Virgin Islands Daily News reported Tuesday the King Airport on St. Thomas is still closed to all but military and emergency flights, at least through Saturday.

“I never could tell if he was getting those messages or not,” Ralph said. The News Tribune also reached out to Alan, but had not received a response Wednesday.

Though rain was coming in through their windows during the storm, Ralph said his brother’s home in the hills still has a roof, unlike many of his neighbors’ homes. “I think he came out pretty good compared to other folks there,” he said.

NBC News reported Wednesday concerns are mounting among St. Thomas’ and other nearby islands’ residents about scarcities of fuel, water, food and security amid fears of looting. The Virgin Islands Daily News also reported Wednesday that thousands of tourists have been evacuated from the island, many by cruise ship.