

TAYLOR dailypress

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Taylor company lends a hand in Louisiana

ERF Enterprise Network Services, which provides telecommunications services to banks, offers local Internet service and is the technical partner for the TaylorCNET community network, deployed technicians to Louisiana to repair damage from hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The crew returned last week after working 11 days in Louisiana, then early this week headed east again, going to Lake Charles, La. to do more repair work.

John Burns, CEO for ERF, said Thursday he and his crew had just arrived in Lake Charles to finish the work and get all branches of the Jeff Davis Bank reconnected to its computer network. The bank is a customer of ERF.

Talking on his cell phone, Burns said he and his crew were stuck in traffic on Interstate 10 east of Lake Charles as they tried to drive to another bank branch.

Traffic is still really bad, Burns said. There aren't a lot of options for routes, so sitting in miles of traffic is just a fact of life.

Burns said his crew has put in 12 to 16-hour days.

It's important to people in the stricken areas to have their banking systems and ATMs up and running as soon as possible so they can access their cash, Burns said.

He said he and his crew lived in an ERF trailer and ate MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) supplied by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) early on.

Our first 11 days in Louisiana, we took a triage approach and just worked to get the network reconnected, Burns said. We knew we'd have to go back later and make the reconstruction permanent, but the primary goal was to get the network back up and running as fast as possible.

Burns kept a diary to document the experience. One of his initial entries described what he observed on the initial trip right after the hurricane hit

The traffic was very heavy. Once we passed the Baytown exit on I-10, all the exits were blocked by military personnel the rest of the way. The devastation from Beaumont to beyond Lake Charles is incredible. Hundred-foot tall pine trees were snapped in half, billboards were knocked down, and military convoys were everywhere.

Burns said he and his crew knew they were facing a major task because needed equipment, especially new microwave towers, would have to be shipped in. Another entry in his diary described the conditions.

The devastation in Lake Charles was breathtaking, Burns wrote. Many houses were destroyed.

Burns said by the third day the MREs were becoming very difficult to eat, but no other food was available.

On Oct. 1, the Red Cross arrived and brought food, Burns said, so the crew no longer had to rely on the MREs.

Using portable generators for power, the crew re-set the communications towers that could be salvaged but had to order nine additional towers to replace the ones that were destroyed.

It's hard to believe, Burns said, but the new towers we ordered were shipped by FedEx. It wasn't overnight delivery, but we sure glad to see those towers as they arrived.

According to Burns, another critical element to get the network running - electricity - began to come back at about the same time that his crew was ready for it.

The commercial centers got electricity back first, Burns said. There still are a lot of places without power.

Participating in the ERF repair effort were John and David Burns, Jody Gayle and Rick White.