

Tacoma, WA -

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Hurricane eyewitnesses to the havoc and the helping

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John Paxson peered through the windows of his tugboat to see what kind of havoc Hurricane Ike was creating outside.

The 47-year-old captain from South Hill was steering his vessel Thursday along the Neches River near Beaumont, Texas, when authorities ordered his and about 20 other tugboats to stop at a nearby bayou for safety. Paxson travels to wherever his Texas-based employer orders him to tug fuel and other chemicals for clients.

But with the boats tied down, all Paxson could do was wait for Ike to stomp through the area and leave when the coast was clear.

It started to rain about 5 p.m. Friday, he recalled during a telephone interview Saturday. Five hours later, the wind started to kick up. By midnight and into early Saturday, the hurricane had officially arrived, along with winds of 75 mph and a downpour of rain.

“There was enough wind to make the boat rock – that’s quite a feat,” Paxson said from his cell phone. “It looked like someone was pouring buckets of water on the window.

“I don’t think you could stand up outside in the heat of it,” he added. “You’d have to hold onto something.”

Paxson – who works on tugboats two weeks at a time – was in the South when Hurricane Gustav was threatening the already battered Gulf communities a few weeks ago.

“That one missed us. This one didn’t,” he said.

Paxson is one of the South Sound’s connections to Hurricane Ike, which by Saturday had punished the Gulf Coast with wind, rain and flooding.

He and his crew survived without too much disturbance.

Another local resident is helping victims left in Ike’s wake.

Shannon Angle of University Place hadn’t heard from her daughter in three days. Still, she

wasn't worried.

Her daughter, Jessica Asplund of Tacoma, was working in the Gulf Coast as a supervisor for the Washington Conservation Corps in King County. That's an arm of the AmeriCorps service organization.

Angle said her daughter — a graduate of Curtis High School in University Place and of the University of Washington Tacoma — was leading a team of corps members helping displaced hurricane victims. Driving in a rented Kia Sedona van to wherever help is needed, the group has slept on cots in churches, worked at shelters and tried to assist in other ways, Angle said.

Asplund last checked in with her mom in the middle of last week, when she was helping displaced residents with special needs reconnect with social services in Baton Rouge, La. Asplund was expecting to be deployed to help Ike victims the last time she spoke with her mother.

Asplund, 25, told her mother she was amazed at the amount of resilience shown by those displaced by the powerful storms.

“She told me that for some of these people, it's just a resignation of, ‘Here we go again,’” Angle said.

She also talked with her daughter about the importance of helping victims who have lost everything to cope.

“That is part of what they tell you when you go into this service,” Angle said. “You may be called upon to help.”

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