

# Whirlwind of activity greets new camp director\_72803

October 14, 2003

Posted: 7/25/03

The duplex where Texas Baptist Encampment interim director Rob Kessler lives with his family and staff member Jeannie Stahlecker and her 10-year-old son was destroyed.

## Whirlwind of activity greets new camp director

**By Jenny Hartgraves**

*Texas Baptist Communications*

PALACIOS—Rob Kessler's first days as interim director of the Texas Baptist Encampment Palacios by the Sea came with a whirlwind of responsibility and weather.

Two days after sending 400 OneCamp campers to Katy and one day after Hurricane Claudette destroyed his new home, Kessler viewed the coast with new eyes.



Bob Kessler, interim director of the Texas Baptist Encampment Palacios by the Sea, stands outside his destroyed home. (Jenny Hargraves/BGCT Photo)

He and his staff survived the storm without any injuries, but the camp was virtually destroyed with the exception of one building.

Kessler waited out the hurricane because it was not forecast to produce much damage. But the storm gained strength prior to hitting the encampment.

“We couldn't have been in a worse location,” he said. “We were right at the wall of the eye and never got a break. The wind was hitting us at 100 miles per hour from every direction.”

The hurricane devastated Kessler's home, a duplex his family shared with Administrative Assistant Jeannie Stahlecker. High winds and a possible tornado stripped off the roof, while a large piece of metal from the nearby dormitory impaled the walls.□

Stahlecker and her 10-year-old son were inside the house when the first winds came. She whisked her son into the closet as the living room wall collapsed, and they covered in prayer until Kessler rescued them.

“We sat in that closet and prayed for 10 minutes,” Stahlecker said. “That prayer came alive. God is good. He kept us safe.”

Kessler and the Stahleckers met other full-time camp staff members in a brick conference building where they anticipated the worst of the hurricane.



The encampment's dormitory was trashed by Claudette's 80-mile-an-hour winds.

They waited safely behind brick walls as Claudette wreaked havoc on the camp—lifting the roofs from the largest dormitory and part of the dining hall, crushing the tabernacle worship center and unleashing the fishing pier to sea.

Heavy rains damaged every building at camp, and all the carpets and roofs will need replacing, he said.

Despite the destruction in Palacios, Kessler sounded upbeat about the clean-up and potential for new facilities.□

The tabernacle worship center, an outdoor facility built more than 60 years ago, was soon to be replaced before it tumbled in the storm, Kessler said. “We had a need for an indoor worship center for a long time, so it's kind of a God thing that it's gone.”

Damage assessments declared the tabernacle and staff home “totaled,” and insurance and emergency relief will cover most of the property damages.

The camp never has gone into debt, but the loss of power concerned Kessler as a potential loss of income from other upcoming camps. “We want to get going,” he said. “We want everyone to know that we're the toughest camp in Texas.”

Texas Baptist Men established feeding units at the camp, and they stayed four days using the camp's kitchen facilities and supplies to feed the Palacios community and surrounding area.

Texas Baptist Men's Collin County chainsaw unit and Retiree Builders arrived in Palacios the week of July 21 to aid in clean up.



The outdoor tabernacle was crushed.

Youth from First Baptist Church in Rosenberg spent two days gathering debris.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas designated \$50,000 to help repair the camp and the staff home.

With the whirlwind of attention and decisions, Kessler had no time to grieve over the damages to the camp and his home, he said. He and his wife have found comfort in his wife's favorite Bible verse.

Jeremiah 29:11 states, "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord. 'Plans to prosper you and not to harm. Plans to give you a hope and a future.'"

"We know that God is going to take care of us," he said. "It might seem kind of creepy to have that attitude, but we're ready for a new beginning."

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