10-1-1999


University of South Florida.
USF-Tulane program weathers storms

Imagine small children wandering the streets after a major hurricane has devastated their tiny town in back on their feet after a deadly natural disaster. In the United States alone, an unprecedented number of large-scale natural disasters occurred between 1989 and 1994. FEMA Director James Lee Witt noted that federal disaster expenditures in the past five years rose from $33 billion to more than $13 billion. While the U.S. can rely on its taxpayers to pay for such relief, most Central American and Caribbean nations lack the big donors that could provide their citizens with relief.

To provide effective relief, officials can consider need-based training. Enter USF and Tulane University. When USF President Betty Castor met formally with Tulane University President Eamon Kelly in 1998, the two decided to find a project the universities could do together. The result: the Center for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance at Tulane and USF.

The center offers education, training, and collaborative research on disaster mitigation, said Eric Matos, deputy director of the center. Michael Conniff, who heads USF's Latin American and Caribbean Studies program, and Bill Bertrand of the Paysan Center of Technology Transfer at Tulane, are co-directors of the center. The center works with the Pacific Ocean’s military command and whoever's in charge of disaster relief for that region.

The USF-Tulane network, which has people working at regional centers in the Caribbean and Central America, so other countries became familiar with what the USF and Tulane employees had to offer. In August, Matos and a Tulane representative went to the Dominica Republic to discuss the Geographical Information System, which maps areas where disasters strike.

Center workers have discussed creating a curriculum in disaster management, and possibly offering a certificate, and bachelor’s and master’s degrees in that field. The program, with instructors from George Washington University, Florida International University, and a university in Venezuela, could be taken via distance education. Currently, USF’s master’s degree in Public Health can be obtained through distance learning courses in Venezuela.

Although most people don’t think about it, “the second disaster in any disaster is the donations,” Matos said. The large number of donations, especially if there are too many clothes or other unneeded items, create a hardship on administrators.

The best donations are cash or checks sent to an organization like the American Red Cross,” Matos said. 

Glitch delays USF-St. Pete four-year program expansion

It was a glitch that kept President Betty Castor from doing everything she wanted to do before leaving USF. But before Castor’s last day on Sept. 22, she assured the university community that the USF-St. Petersburg expansion would occur, with or without her.

State Education Commissioner Tom Gallagher spoke at USF St. Petersburg on Castor’s last working day to assure he was behind the expansion, which will allow the campus to bring lower-level classes to St. Petersburg.

The campus recently organized a small freshman class, but mostly offers upper-level classes to juniors and seniors, as well as graduate courses. Plans were delayed to expand the program on Sept. 17, when the Board of Regents told Castor that St. Petersburg might have to wait until November to hear whether it could begin offering classes to freshmen and sophomores.

The concern wasn’t the proposal’s merits, but Gallagher’s worry that an amended state rule outlining how expansion proposals should be evaluated was not approved yet, according to the St. Petersburg Times.

The approval requires another vote from the governor and state Cabinet. The proposal itself has already received conditional approval from the governor and state Cabinet and was endorsed by the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, as well as twice recommended by the Board of Regents.

University Police officers take down flags in front of the Administration building to prepare for recent storms. The university closed Sept. 15 and 21 because storms threatened the area. USF works with Tulane University to help Central American and Caribbean nations recover from hurricanes and other natural disasters.

Photo by Tom Maguire

Points of Pride

Headly stuff: Plant City resident Betty Herman established a $750,000 endowed scholarship for a USF general reconstruction professorship after being successfully treated for breast cancer by university neurosurgeon Thomas Freeman. The gift will support developing new cellular therapy approaches to treat cancer.

Heavy traffic: The Tampa campus Library counted 3 million visitors in the past year. Another 1.5 million patrons visited the library on-line.

Campaign gives back to community

If you were given the chance to help a child overcome a syndrome, to find shelter for a family that lost everything it owns in a fire, or to provide companionship for an elderly woman living alone, would you do it?

Thanks to the Florida State Employees Annual Fall Charitable Campaign, you can do this and more. USF employees can make a difference in the lives of more than 350,000 Tampa Bay area people who need help.

All USF employees should have received a form to designate a gift to any of hundreds of agencies that directly help others, from the American Red Cross to the Wildlife Conservation Society.

Last year, USF faculty, staff and students gave $300,000, an all-time record, to eligible charitable umbrella agencies, including United Way of Hillsborough County, America’s Charities, Earth Share, Environmental Fund for Florida, Independent Charities of America, International Service Agencies, National Voluntary Health Agencies and Independent Organizations.

Contributors to United Way alone designated 7 percent of their gifts to helping people with disabilities, 30 percent to supporting families, 4 percent to caring for the elderly, 22 percent for improving health and safety and 37 percent to promoting school success.

Those concerned with the portion of their gifts going to administrative costs should note that those costs have dropped significantly over the years. United Way, for example, applies more than 88 percent of contributions directly to local agencies, using less than 12 percent for administration and fundraising.

Just as important, USF stay in the Tampa Bay area. USF’s 1999 goal is $322,120 in charitable contributions, a new president’s deduction is the most direct way to give.

For more information, visit the USF Web site at usfweb.usf.edu/seeec or contact the office of Jane Applegate, chair of this year’s USF campaign and dean of the College of Education, at ext. 4-3400.