

## Doctor, Former Resident Save Lives In Louisiana

By CHRISTIE STORMS  
Specially Written for The Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD - Dr. Michael Catenacci, 31, who graduated from Westfield High School in 1992, spent the two weeks after the hurricane working as an attending emergency room physician in both Tulane University and Charity Hospitals in New Orleans as well as Our Lady of the Lake Hospital in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

In a phone interview with *The Westfield Leader and Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, Dr. Catenacci provided details of his experiences working in the dire circumstances surrounding Hurricane Katrina.

When the storm first hit, Dr. Catenacci and his wife, Dr. Kaira King, 29, a third-year resident, were already at work at the Charity Hospital Emergency Room.

"There were 150 mph winds and all the windows in the buildings were breaking, so there was glass flying everywhere," Dr. Catenacci said.

By Monday night, Dr. Catenacci reported that the storm had seemed to die down. He and his wife walked across the street to sleep at University Hospital, where he was due to start a shift early the next morning.

"At 4 a.m., they woke us up," Dr. Catenacci said. "The levee had broken and flood waters were pouring into the hospital, so we needed to evacuate everyone to a higher floor."

Unfortunately, the hospital had already lost power, and emergency generators had stopped working after six hours, most likely due to their being located on the flooded first floor.

"When you lose electricity it's not just lights and air conditioning. The elevators didn't work, so patients literally needed to be carried up the stairs to a higher floor," Dr. Catenacci reported. "And some patients were on life support breathing machines, so we had to detach them from the machines and manually bag breath into them."

Dr. Catenacci explained the lack of power also interfered with infant heart monitors called LVADs (Left Ventricular Assist Devices), which pump the heart, and staff rotated turns to keep those machines constantly functioning manually for those babies.

They needed to resort to portable oxygen as well.

The lack of electricity and flooding also interfered with plumbing. Toilets no longer flushed and began to overflow, resulting in everyone using bags instead. Dr. Catenacci reported that the staff ripped open packs of saline to bath with in the stifling 100-degree heat.

"You also need running water to dialyze kidney patients because you are essentially taking their blood, filtering out toxins, and giving it back to them," Dr. Catenacci said. "It was critical to get those patients out of there."

By late Tuesday, it was decided that a total evacuation was in order. According to Dr. Catenacci, a makeshift helipad was created on the roof of a neighboring parking garage. They loaded patients into a pick-up truck and drove them up several floors to the roof. But it would take several days to evacuate the estimated 1,300 patients from the hospital.

"The typical police helicopter can only hold one or two patients at a time," Dr. Catenacci explained. "And we couldn't fly any helicopters at night because they were being fired upon."

Dr. Catenacci reported that the military Black Hawk, Chinook and Sikorsky helicopters that could hold 30-40 patients at a time were sent in to help expedite the evacuation. "Luckily, we were able to evacuate all the patients, their families, the employees, and everybody without any deaths," Dr. Catenacci said.

Providing round the clock care for patients gave the doctors little time to reflect on the fact that the broken levee resulted in the loss of the couple's home and possessions. By the end of the week, they found themselves on a helicopter to a local airport and were then put on buses to Lafayette, a city about two hours west of New Orleans. When they arrived, they needed to be decontaminated, which involved stripping off their clothes and throwing them away.

"The water we had been in was basically sewage, so if you got it on your skin, you were at high risk for getting an infection," Dr. Catenacci



THANK YOU... Hannah Painter and Clara Smith of Westfield sold homemade baked goods and lemonade to soccer moms, dads and players at Memorial Pool field last Saturday to raise money for victims of Hurricane Katrina. Due to the incredible generosity of the community, they raised over \$250.

explained. "So they had us shower and gave us tetanus shots, clean scrubs and flip-flops. They also offered us ciprofloxacin, an antibiotic that prevents skin infections and other problems that you can get from walking around in sewage for a few days."

A family friend flew the couple up to Dr. Catenacci's in-laws' home in Dohgan, Alabama, on a private plane. They spent a few days buying underwear and other necessities, and Dr. Catenacci immediately began seeking a new job to help make student loan and other payments as well as to continue to help storm victims.

"Emergency medicine physicians are independent contractors that work for a staffing group and aren't salaried," Dr. Catenacci said. "So we don't continue to get paid like other doctors in the hospital. When the hospitals closed down, our income just ended abruptly."

A friend got Dr. Catenacci a temporary job in the emergency room at Our Lady of the Lake Hospital in Baton Rouge, which is approximately one hour away from New Orleans.

"We're seeing lots of dehydration situations and lots of skin infections from the water," Dr. Catenacci said.

The doctor spent five days there working long hours as Katrina victims filled the hospital to capacity.

"You take the entire population of New Orleans and you disperse it throughout the major cities in Louisiana," Dr. Catenacci explained. "And all of these people have medical problems, so it's taxing the hospitals in

these other cities majorly."

Dr. Catenacci cited that many of the patients don't have primary healthcare providers or Medicare or Medicaid and wound up in the ER because there was no place else for them to go.

"It is literally a logistical nightmare to try to take care of all these people. The Lady of the Lake hospital staff has done an incredible job working under those kind of conditions, seeing volumes they've never seen before," said.

At press time, Dr. Catenacci was on his way back to Alabama to join his wife, whose career has been put on hold due to the fact that she is temporarily unable to complete her residency program.

Dr. Catenacci said they can only live day to day as they struggle to put their careers and lives back together having only escaped with a medical bag and a backpack containing a few belongings.

However, Dr. Catenacci remains quite modest regarding the medical efforts he put forth and the lives he saved.

"I don't think I did anything personally that made a whole bit of difference. The scale of it is just too large," Dr. Catenacci said. "It was a terrible situation, a terrible thing that happened, but the fact that everybody in the hospitals worked together... I think the greater good was served by that."

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## Freeholders Accept Grants; Planning Director Resigns

By PAUL J. PEYTON  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

ELIZABETH - The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders last week approved \$1,236,713 in grants as revenue for the 2005 county budget. The board also announced the resignation of Mary K. Murphy as Director of Planning and Community Development and approved two contracts totaling \$277,500 with the Union County Alliance.

The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services for the Local Capacity Infrastructure for Bioterrorism Preparedness (LINC) program received the largest grant at \$548,103. The state made \$12 million available for grants as part of the fiscal year 2006 state budget.

The county also received a \$120,000 grant for a countywide comprehensive bicycle master plan from the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA), \$200,000 from the NJTPA for a freight access study between Port Elizabeth and Tremley Point in Linden and \$180,000 from the state's Department of Criminal Justice for Gang Suppression grant. Freeholder Dan Sullivan serves as first vice chairman on the NJTPA.

On the appropriations side, the board introduced a \$20 million bond ordinance to finance the renovation of the 254-unit Oak Park Apartments, an affordable housing project in Roselle.

According to the ordinance, all units in the complex are covered by a Section 8 contract administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The apartments are for low and moderate-income tenants. The second reading and public hearing of the ordinance is scheduled for Thursday, September 29.

In other business, the board approved a \$252,500 agreement with the Union County Alliance for long range strategic planning. The contract, which is retroactive to July 1, expires on June 30, 2006.

Department of Finance Director Larry Caroselli said the agreement is the county's annual appropriation for strategic planning with private industry, as well as government. He said the alliance has been "quite successful in turning the economic condition

of the county around."

Created in 1993, the Union County Alliance is an alliance of all major public and private organizations in the county to create a single strong voice to address the county's problems.

Bruce Paterson of Garwood referred to the expenditure as, "a lot of money."

"To spend a quarter of a million dollars for strategic planning, it sounds like a couple of people sitting around a table," Mr. Paterson said.

The board also entered into an agreement with the alliance for \$25,000 to start the Union County Medical Reserve Corps, which will respond to large-scale emergencies and natural disasters.

Under the initiative announced by Freeholder Chairman Rick Proctor in January, volunteers from the health care discipline will be fielded to develop a Reserve Medical Corps that could be used to help and supplement existing emergency workers. Freeholder Proctor is the health officer for Scotch Plains, Rahway, Hillside and Winfield.

The board also approved resolutions to the Borough of Fanwood to close Martine Avenue from North Avenue to LaGrande Avenue on Sunday, October 2, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. for Fanny Wood Day and to the Town of Westfield and New Jersey Transit to hang a banner from the train tracks overpass to promote the "Bike For Life" event on October 2.

At the start of the meeting, Freeholder Dan Sullivan announced that Mary K. Murphy, director of planning and community development in the Department of Economic Development, will be leaving the county to accept a position as director of strategic planning for the New Jersey Turnpike Authority.

"She really has done a remarkable job for us," said Freeholder Sullivan, noting that Ms. Murphy helped the county on number of transportation projects.

She will join Turnpike Authority Director Michael Lapolla, a former Union County Manager and freeholder, and former Freeholder Mary Routolo, the Director of Development for the Garden States Arts Foundation, an arm of the Turnpike Authority.

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The estate was part of the property owned by the first Dutch governor of South Africa and wine has been made there since the 1690s. The wine is crisp and long. The nose is filled with figs and herbs. The palate has pineapple and tropical fruit tones. A good acid and mineral structure leads to a clean limey finish.

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Part of the new generation of Spanish wine that combines the best of ancient traditions with innovative modern winemaking techniques and non-indigenous grapes. This is a blend of Monastrell, Cabernet and Syrah. Full and meaty with blueberry, coffee, plum, and a slight liquor like quality on the palate. Try with roasted meats.

**Wine Of The Week**

**Kracher Scheurebe Zwischen Den Seen T.B.A #6 \$69.99**

Alois Kracher Jr., working with both his father and his son Gerhard, produce what are arguable the greatest dessert wines in the world. He has beaten that famous French wine more than once in blind tasting. Grapefruit, apricot, honey and clove are the most prominent players in a stage full of aromas and tones in this stunning Scheurebe.

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Simi Chardonnay	\$12.99	750ml
BV Coastal Cab/Merlot/Chardonnay/Pinot Noir	\$7.99	750ml
Hess Select Chardonnay	\$8.99	750ml
Toasted Head Chardonnay	\$10.99	750ml

**Your Favorite Whiskey**

Jack Daniels	\$35.99	1.75L
Jim Beam	\$23.99	1.75L
Seagrams 7	\$14.99	1.75L

**Your Favorite Rum**

Captain Morgan	\$23.99	1.75L
Bacardi Silver	\$18.99	1.75L
Bacardi Gold	\$18.99	1.75L
Malibu	\$23.99	1.75L

**Your Favorite Vodka**

Absolut 80	\$31.99	1.75L
Ketel One	\$33.99	1.75L
Grey Goose	\$25.99	750ml
Pravda	\$26.99	750ml
Smirnoff	\$18.99	1.75L
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