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PRESS RELEASE

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RE: Garrett County Superstorm

Date: November 8, 2012

Garrett County has emerged from one of the worst weather events in more than 30 years better prepared for future disasters, officials reported in a two-hour overview of the state of emergency held by the Board of County Commissioners.

Thanks to a host of county, state, federal and private forces working in tandem around the clock since the superstorm hit Oct. 29 – electricity had been restored to all but 86 county customers by Nov. 8 and Garrett County was officially back in business and ready for visitors.

“Who would ever think we’d take the worst hit from a coastal hurricane,” said Commission Chair James Raley, noting a week ago, Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley visited Garrett County and pledged state services to help in the recovery effort. Mr. Raley described the meeting “to look where we were, not what we did right or wrong.” He credited Garrett Emergency Management Coordinator Brad Frantz with “doing a super job,” and called on Frantz and other officials to deliver reports on the successful collaborative response to what he called “a monster of a storm.”

Like they conduct every year, county emergency officials had held their winter operations meeting a week before Hurricane Sandy’s impact, Mr. Frantz said. “We didn’t realize how useful this would be.” As a result, he said, county staff, including 911 personnel, “did an incredible job under adverse conditions. He said the Garrett County Commissioners provided as much “proactive service” as I’ve seen in years.”

As it became apparent the storm would hit the mid-Atlantic and produce snow and wind in the Appalachians, on Oct. 29, Mr. Frantz and county staff outlined a coordinated and comprehensive storm response that included: self-sustaining preparations, generator use preparations, only essential travel and establishing three county shelters. By Oct. 31, the county had sought the help of Maryland Emergency Management, including assistance temporarily transferring patients from Dennett Road Nursing Home to the Southern Rescue Squad Shelter in Oakland, he reported.

Mr. Frantz divided the county into four divisions and 12 task forces, equipped with rescue personnel, chain saw teams and other specialty help. By Nov. 3, “the mission was completed,” he reported, and MEMA was relieved of duty in the county.

Mr. Frantz also acknowledged the stellar work of numerous county departments and state agencies such as the State Highway Administration, State Police, Maryland Emergency Management and the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services. The county also received support from Allegany, Washington, Howard, and Montgomery Counties.

“Thanks to the citizens of Garrett County, who were patient and kind,” he said.

Delegate Wendell Beitzel noted that everyone in Garrett County “pulled together,” including Mennonite volunteers who helped cleared downed trees, residents who donated food to out-of-state utility workers from twelve states and his wife, Ruth Beitzel, who distributed warm socks to utility workers. At a thank-you dinner, which First Energy officials held for utility workers at the Wisp Resort Nov. 7, Mr. Beitzel, the County Commissioners and others received praise and appreciation of the county’s overall hospitality.

During the storm, Garrett County Health Officer Rodney Glotfelty said his office served in a liaison role with Emergency Management and made sure nursing homes and assisted living facilities had generators and were prioritized for power restoration. He said state health officials helped define vulnerable populations in the county and that county home health workers contacted 100 percent of its patients, even if meant “dredging through heavy snow to check on folks.”

The Maryland Institute of Emergency Medical Services made sure hospital discharged patients could go home to homes or shelters with heat and also sought out the Army Corps of Engineers to install a generator at the Dennett Road Nursing Home.

The lead agency for mass shelter and evacuations was the Department of Social Services, under Alicia Street. She called the nursing home evacuation a “seamless process,” said the shelters served residents well and that the department maintains a shelter trailer, stocked with supplies.

“Hats off to the people working in the shelters,” said Mr. Raley, who had visited the Friendsville Shelter. “It seemed to go very smoothly.”

Clearing state and county roadways of downed trees and power lines fell upon Rick Cosner, Resident Maintenance Engineer of the State Highway Administration at Keyzers Ridge and Jay Moyer, Garrett County Roads Superintendent. At the peak of the storm, SHA had 68 pieces of equipment and 29 people working on state highways. Interstate 68 was closed for a brief period and re-opened for eastbound traffic on Oct. 30. SHA workers assisted Garrett County roads crews until Nov. 4. “It was a heavy, wet snow and three feet in some places,” said Mr. Cosner.

Mr. Moyer reported county roads crews worked 12-hour shifts Oct. 29 through Nov. 4 with a goal of keeping roads open and supporting other county agencies as needed. Overtime hours totaled 2708 hours due to the storm, he said. The worst hit areas of the county were Gorman, Oakland-Sang Run and Cranesville. Excluding labor costs, he said the county roads department would request \$259,714 in federal emergency assistance.

“To understand the magnitude of the event,” according to Mr. Frantz, officials removed some 3,000 downed trees, replaced 300 utility poles and replaced more than 50,000 feet of electric wire throughout the county. He said Garrett College provided staging areas, showers and housed workers, while the Exhibit Center and paved parking lot on the County Fairgrounds proved invaluable to utility workers.

All told, he added, “We’ll look at all the constructive criticism of this disaster, and we will get better.”

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