



MICHAEL DIEMER • SARASOTA HERALD TRIBUNE

A waterspout drops from dark clouds in the sky as thunderstorms move into the Gulf of Mexico west of the Longboat Key Club, on Logboat Key, a barrier island off Sarasota, Fla., Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2004. The funnel dissipated as the storm moved farther offshore.

Hurricane Frances gains strength as it heads for the Bahamas, Florida

PROVIDENCIALES, Turks and Caicos — Hurricane Frances battered the Turks and Caicos islands with stinging rains and powerful winds Wednesday, peeling off tin roofs from wooden houses and knocking out power before churning toward the Bahamas and threatened Florida. Frances was already a dangerous Category 4 hurricane, its 140 mph-winds bolstered by even stronger gusts, and forecasters said the storm could get even more powerful. They said Florida, still cleaning up after Hurricane Charley, was a "prime candidate" to be hit as early as Friday.

As the storm approached earlier in the day, scores of islanders fled their homes for higher ground. Club Med's Turks and Caicos resort moved all its guests to safer second-floor rooms as the hurricane passed.

The storm drenched the islands and downed electric lines and trees, knocking out power to Grand Turk Island Wednesday afternoon, said Turks and Caicos Fire Chief Chris Gannon. Emergency workers rescued one woman from her home after the roof blew off.

"If we get through this without any loss of life, it will be a miracle," Gannon said.

Cruise ships diverted traffic out of the storm's path. Flights in and out of the Turks and Caicos were canceled, and many were expected to be canceled Thursday in the nearby Bahamas, where residents in Nassau had started looting bottles of drinking water. The chain of more than 700 islands has a population of about 300,000 people.

With Frances expected to reach the southeastern Bahamas by Thursday, Bahamas Prime Minister Perry Christie urged residents to remain calm but cautioned islanders they could see "the most intense hurricane in recorded history."

Forecasters warned U.S. residents from Florida to the Carolinas to monitor Frances — the third major hurricane of the Atlantic season, following Alex and Charley.

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush declared a state of

emergency, activating the National Guard and nearly a half-million people were ordered to evacuate their homes.

Floridians planning to ride out the storm snapped up canned food, water and generators, while military helicopters and planes were flown out of the area and Cape Canaveral's Kennedy Space Center said it would close Thursday.

"I can't emphasize enough how powerful this is. If there's something out there that's going to weaken it, we haven't seen it," National Hurricane Center director Max Mayfield said.

There were no immediate reports of serious injury as the Turks and Caicos government urged islanders to evacuate and move to shelters. But most of the British territory's 20,000 people were ignoring the call.

"Unfortunately a lot of communities are not taking this seriously," Gannon said. "If we get through this without any loss of life, it will be a miracle."

Structural damage was reported on the territory's low-lying islands, where many houses are either wooden or have tin roofs, Gannon said. Police were going door-to-door and making telephone calls to urge people to move.

"I've never been in a hurricane before, so it should be exciting," said Julie Dilling, 45, who was staying at a shelter with the rest of her scuba diving group from Fort Worth, Texas. "I suppose it just adds to the story. Last year, nothing exciting happened."

Residents flocked to schools for shelter in Providenciales, the main population and commercial center of the Turks and Caicos, about 140 miles north of Haiti. Some hospital patients were also being moved to the shelters.

In the Bahamas, residents blocked the entrance to Chelsea's Choice Water company in Nassau, grabbing bottles from trucks and offering a driver bribes for water. The company's manager called police for crowd control help.

"It's pandemonium — madness!" said manager Tina Knowles.

"If we get through this without any loss of life, it will be a miracle."

— Chris Gannon
Turks and Caicos fire chief

The U.S. State Department issued a travel warning urging U.S. citizens to consider the potential risk of travel to the region.

About 200 non-emergency personnel and their family members working at the U.S. Embassy in Nassau and other U.S. government agencies in the Bahamas were being evacuated to the U.S. mainland, said Stacie Zerdecki, an embassy spokeswoman.

Residents in the storm's path were putting up plywood on their windows. Others were buying emergency supplies, stocking up on bottled water and canned food.

"It's been difficult keeping shelves stocked," said Bruce Souder, managing director of City Markets in the Bahamas.

Club Med evacuated its Columbus Isle resort on San Salvador Island in the Bahamas because it was in the direct path of the storm, said Nadeige Martelly, a Club Med spokeswoman.

Hurricane warnings were in effect for the central and southeastern Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands. A hurricane watch was in effect for the central Bahamas.

At 8 p.m. Wednesday, the hurricane was about 40 miles northeast of Grand Caicos Island. Frances was moving west-northwest at about 14 mph.

Frances passed to the north of Puerto Rico on Tuesday. Puerto Rico saw only moderate rain and winds, and lightning that knocked out electricity to about 17,000 people.

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undergraduate program of biomedical science, which currently mentors more than 2,000 students. Equally significant is the ethnic component of the program — more than 21 percent of the students in the program are ethnic minorities.

The CVMBBS hoped its name change would recruit more graduate students.

"The name change will convey to potential graduate students that the strong presence in biomedical research in this college will enhance their student experience and academic careers," said Evelyn Tiffany-Castiglioni, head of the Department of Veterinary Integrative Biosciences.

To substantiate the name change, the CVMBBS plans to add 37 faculty members to the existing faculty body of 185. An \$8 million building designed for teaching and research has recently been completed. The college will soon start constructing a

research building with an estimated cost of \$10 million.

Kyle Smith, a sophomore biomedical sciences major who is considering applying to the College of Veterinary Medicine, thinks the name change would attract higher quality applicants to the veterinary school.

"I would have to say that a career choice in biomedical research is seen by some as more prestigious, especially since many people think of vet students simply as people who fix broken legs on cats," Smith said. "I think that adding 'biomedical science' to the name would remind applicants of their options in the school."

Castiglioni said the name change will help propel the college toward academic excellence.

"The proposed name change is an outward reflection of the CVMBBS' strategic plan for academic excellence. Our goal is to move up from being the fourth- or fifth-ranked veterinary college in the United States to being the first or second," Tiffany-Castiglioni said.

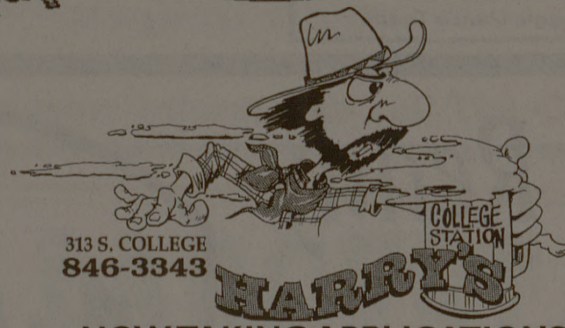
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