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Wednesday, September 14, 2005



# EDMONTON JOURNAL



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## Mississippi misery disturbed rescuers

Edmonton search and rescue team overwhelmed physically and emotionally

**Stephanie Classen**

The Edmonton Journal

September 14, 2005

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EDMONTON - For Daryl Black, the most vivid memory of his trip to the Mississippi coast was that of people driven by desperation to use an apartment building swimming pool as a dumping ground for human excrement.

"The overwhelming smell of garbage, human waste, humanity living in a small, confined area for 12 days with no running water, no supplies and 40-degree heat is actually impossible to describe," he said Tuesday.

"The people we went to talk to, or assess, were people from low-income, government-sponsored housing, so they literally could not go anywhere. Staying was not their choice."

The 33-year-old former president and current search manager of the Edmonton Regional Search and Rescue Association spent five days in the coastal community of Gulfport, performing medical assessments on people who lost all outside communication when hurricane Katrina hit.

After participating in five evacuations and logging countless hours in intense heat, Black said the experience pushed him to his physical and emotional limits.

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"The big thing that people need to realize is that TV does not capture the sights, the sounds, the smells, the energy and the stress level that, as soon as you step out of the van, you can feel," he said. "To see the destruction and the response, there is nothing that would truly prepare you for something of that scale."

Black, along with fellow ERSARA member, Bob Davies, and Tony Clark, of the Community Emergency Response Team from the Northwest Territories, made the trek south after a similar team based out of Houston contacted Clark for help.

Both Black and Davies have extensive training in technical rope rescue and advanced first-aid through ERSARA.

The team of three, weighed down with enough gear, food and water to last a week, used their own Air Miles to get to Mississippi when their original travel plans fell through. Black said the scope of the destruction did not hit him until he went through U.S. Customs.

"(A customs officer) came up to us and it sent chills down our spines, because he looked at us right in the eye and from the bottom of his heart said, 'Thank you very much for going down there,' and he shook our hands."

"It was such an eerie feeling and at that point it was like, 'Wow, the country is hurt down there,' " Black said.

After driving 11 hours past some of the worst hit areas on the coastline, they arrived in storm-ravaged Gulfport and were assigned to a National Guard unit. The team's main objectives were to distribute medication to those in need and to help evacuate people with more serious health problems.

They went door to door looking for people who were unable to evacuate before the hurricane.

"The most rewarding part was going in and giving these people hope. Yes, we did some direct good, but the biggest thing was restoring hope to the community that had absolutely no contact with the outside world," said Black.

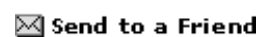
Black has been involved in ERSARA, which typically works with police in the Edmonton area, for 15 years. The volunteer organization has worked on missing persons cases, including that of Liana White, and is an active participant in Project KARE, a program that investigates deaths of sex-trade workers.

ERSARA prepares all its recruits with training in survival, evidence handling and search-and-rescue tactics.

The group has 30 members.

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