

Interviewer: Robert (RB) Berardo

Interviewee: TG Gallo

MU 003 HS

March 18, 2013

RB: This is Bob Berardo, of Monmouth University Department of History and Anthropology. I am collecting an oral history interview of Hurricane Sandy's impact on the Borough of Keyport. I am meeting with TG Gallo on March 18, 2013. Hurricane Sandy came ashore into Keyport, NJ on October 29, 2012 and was felt throughout the Bayshore community. Thank you TG for meeting with me and agreeing to help us compile this oral history of Hurricane Sandy.

TG: Always glad to represent Keyport.

RB: Can you give me some background on yourself? What you do in town, any information about where you live, Family in the area the things we were talking about earlier.

TG: I am recently retired after putting 37 years in the railroad industry. I am the offspring of my mom, one often children from Keyport and my dad, the next town Cliffwood, one of seven. We have been here long enough that we are into fourth cousins and my children are fourth generation Keyport people. As far as experience working in the railroad industry pretty much everything you can imagine. Including handling thousands of people, my specific area was train stations I was responsible for all the train stations in the state of NJ, especially in times of calamity and storms and disruption. So Emergency Management became a natural which I joined after I retired. I am a nine year Fireman, actually Fire Policeman and the public relations person for the Fire Department, and president of the Keyport First Aid, a member of the Historic Society, the Garden Club, and a host of other things in town.

RB: When did you first bear that Hurricane Sandy was heading for New Jersey and possibly Keyport? What did you do to prepare within the Borough for the storm event?

TG: Because of my connection with the Emergency Management group the County was sending our very early alerts about Sandy and my work with the railroad knowing the weather was very important whether it was going to be zero degrees or ninety degrees. So several weeks prior there were predictions that this storm was going to make an impact along the East Coast, whether it would impact NJ was debatable because a hurricane that late in the year usually does not impact NJ, so I would say at least three weeks. As far as preparation, credits to the State and the County Emergency Management groups were putting out early alerts, early meetings, even early scenarios of what ifs. Something they don't do often reversing the traffic on the highways was being talked about early. Mandatory early evacuations were being talked about and were in the cards.

RB: Obviously the storm came up causing a storm surge in the Bay and definitely impacted the Bayshore and Keyport. What was the extent of the damage within the Borough? Where were you during the storm event and how did your needs need to react to some of the events that happened?

TG: Well from the first part of it initially there was an early prediction of a storm surge of 11 feet which is unheard of by most people here during their lifetime, I am 60 and there are some here in their 80's and they were shaking their heads that this couldn't be true but there was a firm prediction that was increased to 13 feet 24 hours before the storm. So we knew we were going to be in trouble. We posted mandatory evacuations in areas that we know normally flood in full moon and a high tide areas. And we posted some voluntary evacuations along the waterfront areas. Could we have gone farther, Yes we could have made some more mandatory evacuations but with three days notices people made the right decisions. The second part of your question what I was doing during the storm, well because [am in Emergency Management I was dispatched to the Emergency Operations Command Center (the Borough Hall) we were attached to the Police Department and the dispatch. And the Borough Council Chambers became the Incident Command Center. We had representatives from all the departments there to make coordinated decisions because at that point everyone needs to work together and everyone did work together ... We did not do the New York thing arguing with each other. From there power was lost, some predictable, JCP&L knew their substation in Union Beach was going to go under. To give an example of connections you have, [was in charge of a major railroad terminal in North Jersey at 2pm the water was at the door to the waiting room high tide was scheduled for 8:30pm everyone knew the Path train was going to flood and that water equals our water because water reaches its own level. We almost had a regular high tide at 2pm and still had 6 more hours of incoming water. So we lost power there and had to set up a shelter not so much because of the loss of power but because one of our senior high-rise building because it lost a brick facade and it fell on the gas meter and of course the gas company couldn't take any chances and had to shut off the gas, and forced us to evacuate two senior High-rise buildings. A third building got 4 feet of water in the first floor the bad thing is that the buildings switch gear is on the first floor so the electric had to be shut-off even once the power came back it took almost 6 weeks to get everything back in order. I was reassigned to the shelter down at the Central School at our maximum we had 275 people, which included a lot of people from Union Beach. And give credit to the County they sent us 250 cots and blankets, we made a Cafeteria, a gymnasium, School hallway and classrooms a shelter with a food depot, clothing depot, and served three meals a day for 14 days, we had entertainment come in, therapy dogs, a couple bands come in. Electric came back on for the majority of the town in 5 to 6 days. But to the East and West ends of the town it was as long as 11 days, different grids. The School got power back in 5 days. However because of the brick facade and the engineering we had to continue to run the shelter even though electricity was available because the gas meter was still under the bricks. So we continued to run the shelter for that time, we fed anybody who came in, we did not care where you were from if you were hungry you had a hot meal.

Jumping ahead we kept track of staff hours, all volunteer hours, it was everyone from nurses, to truck drivers, to you name it including the High School kids who were out of schools because we blocked their school were in everyday sorting food preparing meals made friends with the seniors, talk about closing up a generation gap. A 16 year old knowing that their senior friends didn't like their eggs one way and made sure they got them the right way, getting another pillow, talk about bridging a couple of generations, that was great. We put in roughly 11 ,000 hours into FEMA just for running the shelter and I don't want to say it was just people from Keyport, Union Beach, or Cliffwood, people from Parsippany would bring down batteries and things we needed who read on Facebook that we were short on this or that and bring them down. It became one of those things once I mentioned it to someone that we were short on something they would put it out on Facebook and within 24 hours it was coming in the door, which kept us from taking things we didn't need and redirecting the resources. If I over answered I am sorry there.

RB: No, that's fine, you answered number 4 for me unless you feel there was something unique event that happened that you wanted to talk about?

TG: What I found unique was there were some people whose job had reactivated with the restoration of electricity they had to go back to work but they went from work back to the shelter. So if they worked through the night at the shelter then went directly to their job and then return and they continued to do that. While I don't believe that is unique because I come from a town that is an epicenter of volunteerism that is my humble feeling about Keyport. I found it amazing that people could continue to do this for 8 or 9 days they did not selfishly say that my house was ok so they stayed away. What do you need me to do? Scheduling was automatic we had clipboards I did not have to ask anyone to stay, people just signed up filling voids. And we had things we didn't need like baby diapers through a friend at Bayshore Hospital we found out that Egg Harbor was depleted of baby supplies, we packed them up and drove them down because we knew they had no way to come and get them, people used their own gas, which was difficult to get and agreed to drive them down.

RB: Do you know to what level of economic impact the storm had on the Borough, other than just having to rebuild?

TG: I would hesitate to say that Keyport impact was unique excessive indifferent to other locations. We know because we are close with people from Union Beach, the personal devastation in Union Beach I believe far exceeded Keyport. Several hundred homes many that cannot be rebuilt either physical or financially. In Keyport we lost one area where people live that often goes underwater it is 12 units and it may not come back. On the other end of town there is another 10 units still questionable whether there was structural foundation damage. And one or two homes that had several feet of water or a single foot of water, to my knowledge they have all been allowed to reoccupy or rebuild either through insurance or FEMA funds, we didn't lose any individual homes. So when you spread it around like that now you go to the businesses. All of our Marinas took a beating boats were pushed up all inland in a Southwest direction some

all the way to Highway 35 were the water doesn't get high enough to do that. And no intent to make light of it but the boats looked like sardines laying up against each other, they were that formally laid up, they were not askew. Like the surge knew exactly where they wanted them to go and laid them up. It was the same at Pederson's, and at Brown's point Marina. The business community took a beating. And to your point about the seasons the boats were dry docked and still damaged; ironically the boats that the owners did not get out of the yacht club were still there after the storm and did not sink. Our boat builders and marina basins took a major hit. Our icons of Keyport, the Ye Cottage Inn, been there since the 4th generation of my family eat there and no official word that the owners have decided to rebuild or insurance settlements or even FEMA recognition. What I do know from my Emergency Management capacity the bulkhead behind them is in bad shape and is a private bulkhead and they are going to have to do something about that. On a smaller note one of our 1961 icons "Mikes Subs" is going to be opening in the next week or two. If you need to comeback and talk to me we will meet at Mikes and have a sub. Not sure how he expedited the process as you have heard insurance is slow, FEMA is slow. Possibly he used some of his own resources; photographed documented and said he would go after the money later. Drew's Bistro opened is at the bottom of the hill here opened last week to rave reviews. Not sure if you eat there, I am on the KBBC group. And everyone else cleaned up most of our store areas are elevated, Mike's Sub and Apollo Sewer have renovated their offices. Some of the closed businesses, Hot Dogs RB the trailer was destroyed but he was closed for a couple of years no loss per say no loss of jobs. Our waterfront such great reviews after many years of design development and great use. The water did its damaged to the handrails and pier, the town just does not have a pocket of money to put out and wait for remuneration and the public wants to go down there. One of the things on a personal note, the Steamboat dock museum forty year agreement from 1974 for a dollar per year the borough owned the building a lot of us had fixed it up, kept it in good shape. Had 12 feet of water in it the water was into the A-frame the structure of the building was an old fixture a loose cinder block, literally knocked the building down. We were fortunate to get a lot of stuff out and many people are waiting to donate new stuff.

RB: Since you have been involved with the Borough for quite a while were you here for any past storms (Tropical Storm Irene, or others)? How did the damage compare?

TG: Yes, if I can include Irene and the storm the previous year that we had a heavy rain, before they named those storms. Sandy was strictly a tidal effect the rain stopped and if it had not we would have had suffered a lot more damage. During Irene and the year before during the rain storm (at a rate of 4-5 inches per hour) filled up the storm sewer capacity was maxed that rain came across Keyport inland and filled up a basement of an apartment complex on Atlantic Street. All of our North South roads were impassible Broad Street, Main Street, and Atlantic Street. Much more extreme climatic storm events including Sandy (a culmination of two storms, and the most recent snow storm was two storms) so yes different damage we have a lot more road and basement flooding with Irene and from storm events with large volumes of rain more inland flooding. Tidal flooding is mostly the creeks and the waterfront.

RB: Earlier you had mentioned about losing power so we have answered this question. Did the Borough lose Electric power? When did it go out and how long was it out? Do you feel the Utility companies did all they could to correct the problems and have they made any corrections for future storms?

RB: Through our conversation you had mentioned about the County / State / Federal gov' t assist during the event? Is there anything else you want to mention about how well they did any areas they could have done better?

TG: There was one incident here that particularly in light of Irene that our governor and all elected officials asking the power utilities to be more prepared and forthright. We had an incident here .. you asked me when did the power go out and I can tell you it was exactly at 8:29pm. And the reason I know that is because they shut the substation down because it was going to flood. We had County information that said they were not going to shut the power down. The people on the ground level here knowing people we heard the power was going out at 8:29pm we called up and they denied it. We called many times and they kept say it was not going to happen. At 8:29 pm everyone's clock stopped everything went dark and there was no way it was storm damage you get one street one grid, the whole are went dark. Since I worked were I did on the railroad it runs on 25K volts no one person decides to shut it off, it's a talked out thing about shutting the system down, its planned. You don't want trains stuck some where they shouldn't be, you get somewhere and unload by 8:00pm. I can't believe one person decided to shut it down. That one thing bothered me. Now it was ok it was understandable why they shut it down. You don't want water to hit the system and blow fuses and cause damage. But be forthright about the need to shut the system down. With a six hour cresting Union Beach had to know the same thing we knew that the water was going to reach Hazlet. Let's stop pretending, you know the movie Jaws in which they didn' t want to shut the beach .. Shut the beach... sorry I didn't want to put in a movie analogy. That was a perfect analysis was someone trying to save face. Tell us you have to shut it off I can prepare better.

I have to credit, and I don't mean this politically, the governor put his foot down and put out a state of emergency. That helps the towns let a mayor begin to put out notices, putting out evacuations and a state of emergency. Because he is following suite and not waiting to the last minute. We had a good three days' notice that something horrible was going to happen. And because you are doing research the County OEM Sheriff's office did hold a critique meeting, what worked well and what did not and the

Power and Light Company took the majority of commonality bits. We all expected to have flooding, we got our people out of the way and no one from Union Beach or Keyport died and our people acted properly, we only had a couple of people we had to evacuated with a boat and then good follow up, someone asked how did it go, can't do any better than that.

RB: Well your heading right into the next questions. I like interviews like this you can just keep

going. What did you learn from this experience both for your responsibility with the Borough and for you personally?

TG: Well personally I looked at my own family, I have three dogs, my house only lost power I live on an embranchment and the water came within 2 feet of my house never saw that Hurricane Donna came up half way and Irene didn't come up at all and we never got anything in the house, no damage and in six days we had power back. I was not living there but my wife was and she was alright. I was happy that my family came out, my children came out, my sisters came out, and my 70 year old aunt from the senior building was serving dinner at the center. It makes you feel good when everyone volunteers.

How many times in the last 20 to 30 years nationally or overseas, we hear that bad weather is coming ... oh they are hyping the event... What I am learning is that you have to take as much information as possible. A case in point this last so called storm we put out a notice, there was a feel the notice was not necessary. All the notice said was to monitor the weather check your supplies, batteries, candles and what

not. It might have been just a 12 hour outage; it was a late storm, some wind, heavy snow, knock a few trees down. It was just a notice to put people on their guard. I am going to put that notice out. Lf on Monday morning when the sun is out say that the emergency management people are getting like the

weather people with overkill. I am not covering myself I am helping you cover yourself.

I learned a lot about my own town, we had not seen that kind of tidal flooding in years. There are a number of us looking to review the flood mitigation plan for the town; it is done every five years at the County level. The County asked after Sandy if the town would like to amend your Emergency management plan -we wrote oh yes. I now know where to look for bridge cleaning and dredging and evacuation routes. L may have to rethink some of the things for our Emergency Management Plan for my town. So I don't send people to the wrong spot. And using the school for an evacuation center was a good idea we could possibly house 400 people because at 275 we were not maxed out. So we are effecting maybe a portable generator for the town, we could put it on a wagon and take it somewhere else. We learned a lot more detailed planning for the serious what if scenarios.

RB: And the final question, you talked about a lot of this. The areas that were impacted are there plans to change anything in the re-build process all the impacted areas? How will they protect them from future storms?

TG: I can't speak for the two apartment complexes because they are private and to my knowledge we have guided them to FEMA but I do not know what status they are at. As you have probably heard structures on a slab are difficult to raise, if at all. And I believe both of them are and they are brick structures. And if they don't raise them they get flooded seven times a year from high

tide and full moon floods. The waterfront and pier that belong to the Borough will be rebuilt. But the Historical Society Museum will not be rebuild we enjoyed our 40 years but it is foolish to rebuild. We are currently looking to move into the business district to be more involved with town events. We have an option to buy or rent and to do other things. And how to protect them in the future, the promenade is just cement and railing, if it wasn't for the process of insurance and FEMA, you could have gone out and purchased the railing it would be repaired and people could be fishing already. It's easy to fix, that's the kind of stuff you put on your waterfront you put up stuff that's easy to fix. Don't put infrastructure that is impossible to maintain and a couple storms would destroy it. If you lose a bench you lose a bench.

RB: Well I thank you very much for your time and we will be following up as we go along.

TG: Weill would like to thank you and Monmouth University for doing this, it's a big task. And I think this kind of study of the storm is important because it will give a sense of the whole thing, you read in the paper about one town and then an article about another town. This might give it a nice broad approach. And I think people will enjoy it. If nothing else it's a document that in a hundred years will still be around.