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# Local News

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO  
An example of what Hurricane  
Ike did to Galveston, Texas.

## Waterbury native part of team aiding hurricane-hit island

BY LAURESHA XHIHANI  
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

When Michael Purcaro arrived at Galveston Island in Texas nearly a week ago, he could easily imagine what the aftermath of a nuclear attack would look like.

"It's unbelievable. It looks like ground zero after an atomic blast," Purcaro said.

The devastation he surveyed was left behind after Hurricane Ike passed through.

Debris litters every corner of the island. There are carcasses of dead animals. Water left behind from the storm has pooled and become stagnant.

Search and rescue helicopters hover over the island and medical helicopters come and go, evacuating patients.

Purcaro, a Waterbury native, is part of a 20-member Connecticut Disaster Medical As-

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# IKE: Scene similar to nuclear blast site

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sistance Team that is helping manage the only emergency room on the island, at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. This is the third trip to the region by the group, which was deployed twice for Hurricane Gustav.

It is the first mission for Purcaro, who is the chief contracting and grants officer for the Connecticut Department of Health and the town of Vernon's emergency management director.

Pictures Purcaro took on the island show mounds of debris from buildings that were blown away.

Boats sit in the middle of roadways and on top of buildings. There are pictures of dead animals, including a cow lying in a pool of stagnant water.

Purcaro said until Tuesday he and the crew lived "like the locals," surviving on bottled water and packaged dry food packets like the ones used by the military.

Purcaro, whose extended family owns Frankie's, the local restaurant chain, said he is dreaming of Frankie's hot dogs.

He said for several days staff used a makeshift bathroom consisting of a bucket inside a tent. Showers consisted of a bag of wet sanitation towels. Team members slept on the bus that brought them to the island.

On Tuesday, Purcaro said, the biggest luxuries they've

seen all week were delivered: a porta-potty and shower units.

Local officials have estimated 15,000 to 20,000 people rode out the storm on Galveston Island. Five died.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 57,500 people lived on the island. The island was devastated once before by a storm in 1900 that killed 6,000.

Just before Ike hit, officials issued a mandatory evacuation order, but some decided to ride out the storm.

The hospital was shut down. Emergency room staff rode out the storm and were replaced with the team from Connecticut and teams from Rhode Island and Iowa.

The island still has no running water, no working sewers and no power. No one is allowed to return to the island, except for emergency personnel, and those remaining are encouraged to leave.

The emergency room is seeing about 100 patients a day, the overwhelming majority of whom are suffering from chronic problems and need medicine. Other patients suffer from burns, scrapes, cuts and trauma. Those who need to be hospitalized are flown off the island on medical helicopters to hospitals on the mainland.

Doctors from the three teams often work double shifts and the rest are working 12- to 14-hour days. Still, Purcaro said, all are glad to be there.

"It's the most American thing we can do," Purcaro said.