



# LEON COUNTY'S RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

## LEON COUNTY RESPONDS DURING COMMUNITY'S TIME OF NEED

In 2016, the Leon County community experienced two events that clearly demonstrated the resilience and compassion of its citizens. At 5:00 AM on Saturday, July 2, a bus carrying approximately 35 Haitian migrant workers en route to their homes in Belle Glade, Florida collided with a tractor trailer on Coastal Highway 98 in Wakulla County. Immediately, Leon County and a host of community partners took action to reunite the victims of the accident with their families in Belle Glade. Private, nonprofit, and government partners came together to provide care and services for these individuals – many of whom lost their belongings in the crash – including Creole language translation, meals and lodging for family members, cell phones to communicate with family members unable to visit, restoration of identification, and ultimately transportation to get home.

Only weeks later, on September 2 Hurricane Hermine made landfall on a path that led directly through Leon County. Hermine was the first hurricane to hit Florida in 11 years and was the first storm to cause as much damage

to our community since Hurricane Kate in 1985. Once again, our community came together to meet the needs of our citizens in the aftermath of the disaster. Government and volunteer organizations partnered to provide food, water, and hygiene kits to citizens who lost electrical power to their homes. A comfort station was established at the Leon County Main Library for citizens to get out of the heat, charge their electronic devices, and receive information about available support services. Citizens invited their neighbors without power into their homes and helped them to clear trees and debris from their property.

Serving as the central hub for emergency management coordination, the Leon County Emergency Operations Center remained activated for eight days. In the beginning of the response, critical staff from the County, City and other nonprofit partners worked around the clock for 111 hours. Before, during, and after landfall of Hurricane Hermine, the Emergency Operations Center performed flawlessly in service to the community.



### TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT



**Downed trees, power lines leave 100,000 without power across storm-ravaged region**

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**Alligator Point wallcaved; now coast cleans up**

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**County, city to waive permit fees to rebuild after Hermine**

**SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT**

To help the community rebuild after Hurricane Hermine, Leon County and the City of Tallahassee will waive growth management and building permit fees for storm-related repairs. Fees will also be waived retroactively for completed projects. Permit fees to remove storm-damaged trees will also be waived.

To be eligible for the waiver, the person performing the work must be the homeowner or a licensed contractor. As a reminder, when using a contractor, you should always make sure that a contractor is licensed by the State of Florida. The licensing process protects property owners from incompetent, dishonest or predatory workers.

A list of licensed contractors can be found at [www.floridalicense.com/licenses/](http://www.floridalicense.com/licenses/) or by calling the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation at (850) 487-1300.

Starting today, those interested in the waiver should contact either City of Tallahassee Growth Management at (905) 801-2700 or Leon County Development Support and Environmental Management at (850) 606-1300 or [www.leoncountynv.org](http://www.leoncountynv.org).





# TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT



The Haitian community in Tallahassee pitched in to help the crash victims get back to their families after last week's bus crash in Wallula.

## Volunteers bridge language barrier for crash victims

SEAN ROSSMAN  
Special Staff Writer

As the twisted metal still smoldered in Wallula County on July 1, Leon County government, local hospitals, nonprofits and Tallahassee's Haitian community mobilized.

Soon, more than a dozen people in hard hats and their bus ran a flashing red light and collided with a semi truck, would be released from local hospitals. The initial with nothing. Their positions were burned when the bus caught fire. Because they couldn't speak English, they were unable to convey their basic needs.

The worst crash Wallula County Sheriff Charlie Cress had seen in his time on the force, killed four people and left dozens more hospitalized at Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare and Capital Regional Medical Center. Helping the shaken victims was their first and most important test for local disaster relief organizations help the migrant workers would demonstrate their adaptability and highlight Tallahassee's diversity.

By 11 a.m. on the morning of the crash, Leon County Chapter of the American Red Cross on Rafterwood Drive. Knowing there would be a language gap, some who could speak Creole. It turns out a handful of county workers could speak the language. They also Club, a Tallahassee-based group of about 100 members.

Altogether, about 17 Creole speakers came to the temporary shelter within hours of the crash. There under nurse. They also chatted with the injured about their families' and brought them food and blankets.

John L. Dobby

Sharon Zyles, executive director of the Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross, estimates about 30 total volunteers from a wide range of organizations stepped up to help.

About 15 of the victims stayed at the temporary shelter the night of the crash. The next afternoon, the South Florida, dropping them off at their homes in dropped off at 3:30 a.m.

"All they wanted to do is go home," said Julie Smith, the Salvation Army's community relations coordinator. "To be able to get them home was a really good deal for us."

The efforts of Leon County and volunteers haven't waned. Leon County set up its own system of making families safe. Each crash victim released from the hospital will be assigned a county employee, who will act as their case manager. The case managers have helped victims pick up prescriptions and assisted with finding them a way back home. The county has even set up the money to help pay some of the victims' temporary. Those costs already have been covered by the community donations.

