

FEMA provides Liverpool man bridge to recovery

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A survivor's story: One year after Hurricane Harvey

AUSTIN, Texas — Greg Norman and his dog, Jake, live in a nice, comfortable home that has largely been rebuilt since Hurricane Harvey. Norman knows, however, things could have turned out very differently if it weren't for the help of charitable organizations and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"I wanted to be the guy who told FEMA how much I appreciated them," Norman said in June, "because without their assistance, without any exaggeration, Jake and I could be living under a bridge somewhere."

Norman lives in Liverpool, Texas, where the Chocolate Bayou winds lazily past his backyard. In the 34 years he had lived there before Harvey, Norman had seen floodwaters reach his back door once, but they had never entered his home.

As Harvey approached, though, he could see things might be different this time.

"I saw Harvey coming, and Harvey got hung between two high-pressure systems, one to the west and one to the east," Norman said. "It was obvious to me, knowing a little bit about weather, Harvey had nowhere to go. He was hemmed in."

Once Harvey reached Norman's area, the hurricane "just lingered and lingered and lingered," dropping more than 50 inches of rain on parts of Brazoria County, which includes Liverpool.

Norman saw the Bayou level rising from his backyard, so he grabbed his important documents and got in his truck with Jake to evacuate. At the time, the roads were still passable, so he made his way 5 miles down the road to two friends' house.



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Norman and Jake were safe at their friends' house for almost two days. Then water started creeping toward that home as well, and they had to evacuate again.

Norman drove to a church in town that was sheltering evacuees, and he and Jake spent the next two nights sleeping on a pallet on the concrete floor. Then a family with a large number of dogs was taken in by the church, and the shelter became too hectic. Norman and Jake were on the road again.

Their next emergency shelter belonged to the same friends they had stayed with earlier. The friends owned a farm nearby, which included an unfinished building with no running water or electricity. But it was good enough for Norman and Jake. They stayed there for two nights before finally returning home to view the damage.

"It was about September the 2nd when I walked in my door and saw that I was wiped out," Norman recalled. "I truly thought that I wasn't going to be able to come back home."

Mud covered the floors and walls, the refrigerator was upside-down, and Norman's belongings were all ruined: clothing, photos, keepsakes — it all had to be thrown away.

The water had reached a height of 6 feet, 7 inches, inside the home. In addition to new clothes, furniture and appliances, Norman needed new floors, sheetrock, plumbing and electrical wiring.

"I had a skeleton of a house. ... I had to start completely over," he said. "But while I was staying at the church ... I felt so hopeless, I couldn't decide what to do, and I said, 'I think I'll go ahead and get registered with FEMA.' And this was before the event was even over, so I think that was probably a smart move on my part."

Within 15 days, Norman looked at his bank account and saw it had been filled with \$32,000 from FEMA. He said the FEMA process was seamless, but he still needed more help.

"Now, \$32,000, you'd think it would go a really long way," he said. "It does not. Building materials and all are so high [priced]."



Members of a church came to Norman's home and put up all new sheetrock for free. Later, the United Way donated all new appliances. He also received assistance from the Liverpool city government and the American Red Cross.

He stressed, though, that he wouldn't have received any of that help if he had not actively sought it out.

"You are not going to recover from something like this by staying in bed and thinking 'Woe is me.' You've got to get your butt into gear," he said. "[Help] is not coming to your door. I was online constantly with different organizations, searching for help."

Now living comfortably in his newly furnished home, Norman feels grateful for all the assistance he has received — and for the country he loves.

"I talk to people overseas all the time. They have no FEMA; they've got nothing. If they have a cataclysmic event, they're on their own," he said. "I thank God I'm in the United States, where I had this opportunity. I don't care how cheesy that sounds."

For additional information on Hurricane Harvey and Texas recovery, visit the Hurricane Harvey disaster web page at www.fema.gov/disaster/4332, Facebook at www.facebook.com/FEMAharvey, the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at www.twitter.com/FEMARegion6 or the Texas Division of Emergency Management website at <https://www.dps.texas.gov/dem/>.



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