

# When Fay threatens, Boy Scouts do 'what we do'

## Minnesota troop helps Keys special-needs residents

By **KEVIN WADLOW**

Posted - Wednesday, August 20, 2008 06:01 AM EDT



After leaving the Florida Sea Base camp, Scouts Matthew Frank, Tyler Welch and Weston Birnbaum were among a contingent from Minnesota's Troop 283 that took shelter at Monroe County's mainland evacuation site during Tropical Storm Fay.

The oldest Boy Scout troop in Minnesota wrote a new chapter Sunday, forced to flee the Keys in the approach of Tropical Storm Fay. After the Boy Scouts' Florida Sea Base adventure camp on Lower Matecumbe Key closed, the 11 Minnesota Scouts from Troop 283 and four adult troop leaders spent Sunday night in Monroe County's mainland shelter.

And when special-needs patients from the Keys arrived at the shelter at Florida International University, the Scouts pitched in to help carry luggage and medical supplies up to the second floor.

"We were happy to help," said Brent Kellum, scoutmaster of the troop from Wayzata, Minn. "We're Scouts; it's what we do."

The FIU shelter took in 14 special-needs patients from the Keys. They were attended by Monroe County Fire Rescue staff, said shelter director Ted Cudnick, a Red Cross volunteer from Tavernier. Aside from the medical patients, the Minnesota Scouts were the only Keys evacuees at the shelter by mid-day Monday.

The Scouts made six scuba dives from Sea Base before being told by camp staff that the camp had to close before Fay's arrival.

"They were busy buttoning up Sea Base and securing the boats," Kellum said. "They told us 5,000 groups had been through the base since the last time they had to close for a storm, but unfortunately we were 5,001."

The Scouts missed three scheduled dives but will receive credit for future visits. They also will receive a special "storm badge," considered a Scout collectible.

"Now we can say we've been through a hurricane," grinned Scout Weston Birnbaum, tucked into his sleeping bag on the floor of the FIU center's gym.

"This is our space," Cudnick said, gesturing to the empty expanse of the gym. "It's not much to look at."

But with plenty of room, locker-room facilities and a dining area for meals, the FIU recreation center makes an excellent short-term shelter, he said.

"We could probably handle 3,000 or 4,000 people if we had to," Cudnick said.

Most of the local Red Cross shelter volunteers stayed in the Keys this week to staff local emergency shelters, he said. "Our Red Cross volunteers are out there doing something every day," Cudnick said. "It just doesn't show up in the paper."

County Fire Rescue staff "does a whale of a job" with the severely ill or infirm patients they evacuated, Cudnick said. "They deserve a lot of recognition."

In the most recent Keys evacuation before Fay, 21 special-needs patients were housed at the FIU shelter.

With no one else in the gym, Scouts burned off energy playing basketball and throwing a football. Portable DVD players, MP3 players and video games saw plenty of use.

Scout Drew Kellum celebrated his 15th birthday at the shelter Monday. A small ice-cream cake was brought in for the occasion.

"We've been treated exceptionally well," said his dad Brent, the scoutmaster. "They've been feeding us well, and these boys can eat. We had a Cuban dinner, which was great. We have like one Cuban restaurant in Minnesota."

Even though they had to leave Sea Base early, the Scouts had no regrets about their Keys sojourn.

"Except for getting stuck [in Sunday's slow evacuation traffic], it's been a wonderful experience," Kellum said. "The diving is a lot better in the Keys than in Minnesota."



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Story from KeysNet.com - <http://www.keysnet.com/212/story/18718.html>