

## Remembering Hurricane Hugo: An Interview with Charleston Mayor Joe Riley



**Q.1 What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about the upcoming 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hurricane Hugo?**

*Hurricane Hugo was a life-changing event and an enormous learning period. We found that each one of us has inside the strength and determination to rebound after a disaster and be better than before. We found that we could rely on our neighbors, here and in the rest of the country, to come to our assistance, that we were not alone.*

*I think that it is hard to believe that 20 years have passed and at the same time, that it also seems not so long ago.*

**Q.2 What was it like during the days leading up to and immediately following Hugo?**

*The days before were spent in planning and preparation. We realized that we needed to make sure that our residents understood the urgent need to evacuate, the need to prepare their homes and to take the threat seriously. We boarded up City Hall as an example of preparations and to convey that we took Hugo seriously. We knew that, as with any large storm, it could turn away from us and go up the coast. But the risk of waiting until the last minute would put lives in danger so we worked hard to get people out of harms way as early as we could.*

*Following Hugo was a period of damage assessment, taking stock of our resources and developing a plan for recovery. One of our first tasks was to open roads. We had to find a 'new normal' and keep the community focused and their morale up. We set goals and let our residents know as we reached those goals. We let them know about all of the equipment and personnel from other communities coming to help, that the rest of the region and country cared about us and that we would be able to recover from this storm.*

**Q.3 What lessons (positive & negative) were learned from Hugo? Can you provide a few examples of how these lessons have been implemented on a local/state level to improve operations for the next storm?**

*Evacuation from the area during Hugo was a lesson in two directions: that our residents would listen when asked to leave and that we needed to have a highly developed plan for our roadways. The State now has in place a very effective way to get residents out and it is well publicized. Through the County, we have Evacuation Pick Up Points for those who need transportation. We have also refined our Emergency Operations procedures for the City and have practice drills on a regular basis.*

*We also have contracts for debris removal in advance and they are at a county level. This provides for personnel and equipment to be here as soon as possible. Getting roadways cleared means that those who have evacuated can return sooner.*

**Q.4 What do you want the people of the Lowcountry to know as we head into the heart of this year's hurricane season?**

*Nothing takes the place of planning and preparedness. Have on hand the materials you will need to prepare your home and your family for a storm. Know where you will go and arrange an out of town contact to relay info about conditions and locations of family. Make advance arrangements for your pets. If you are unable to leave, make sure you know what shelters are available to you, especially if you have special needs. Heed the voluntary evacuation order if it comes and don't wait for a mandatory order. If you wait for a mandatory order, you may not be able to go where you want.*

**Q. 5 Are there any other points you would like to make?**

*Understand that decisions made in advance of and after a storm are made for your safety. Hurricanes are unpredictable and officials use the most current information possible in making decisions. If the storm turns away from us, we all are thankful that we are spared any devastation. Please know that your officials are prepared and ready to lead our area through any disaster.*