

# After Ike: True Community Emerges at Palisade Palms

BY CAMILLA MCLAUGHLIN

Usually it takes months, even years, for a true community to come together in a new building. But Hurricane Ike shortened that process to little more than a matter of hours for a small coterie of owners and staff at Palisade Palms, a luxury condominium located directly on the beach in Galveston Island.

"Absolutely! We came together as a community, big time," observed resident Manfred Lott of the bonds that were forged in the days after the storm. Palisade Palms is not only the most luxurious condominium along the Texas Gulf coast, but owners like Lott attest that it is also one of the few to ride out Ike virtually unscathed thanks to storm resistant construction technology.

"It's ironic. Four months after we moved into our new home, Galveston had the worst hurricane since the 1900 Storm," observed Lisa Harris, one of a handful of owners who remained as Ike approached despite persistent pleas from the developer to evacuate.

Harris stayed because her husband Kerry, who was scheduled for surgery days after Ike made landfall, was not well enough for the rigors of an evacuation. As the storm grew so did Lisa's concern but Kerry, who had done a lot of research into the construction of Palisade Palms, assured her that she was "in the safest place in Galveston."

Lott, a retired Lockheed engineer, shared Kerry Harris's confidence. "I watched the building being constructed for two years. I knew about the window design. I knew the building would be safe," he says.

Since Palisade Palms is the tallest building on Galveston Island and the first "on the beach" project to be built on the Island in more than 20 years, developers, Falcon Group of Houston, made the ability to withstand hurricane force winds and a storm surge a top priority.

The building sits on top of a three-level podium, which is also the parking structure that is designed to allow a storm surge to pass underneath the building. The first habitable level of the building - the lobby, is 33 feet above sea level and almost twice as high as the Galveston Seawall.

Additionally, wind tunnel testing conducted by the Alan G. Davenport Wind Engineering Group using the University of Western Ontario's Boundary Layer Wind Tunnel gave developers a realistic assessment of how the structure would perform in a

hurricane. "From a design standpoint, we pulled in many more specifications than were mandated including Texas Windstorm Codes, FEMA codes and some of the Dade County Florida codes on wind impact. I am happy that the building performed so well," says Arnold Tauch, founder and CEO of Falcon Group.

During the storm, the Lotts and Lisa and Kerry Harris, who have units on lower floors, all said the only evidence of the storm they could feel was a slight vibration when they touched their windows. Lott even slept most of the night as the storm passed over.

The next morning, they awoke to discover that the sales building located adjacent to the towers was a twisted heap of rubble, while Palisade Palms, according to Rosa Lott, "looked like nothing had happened."

Most surprising for the Lotts and other owners was the dedication of the building's staff. Most of the staff opted to ride out the storm in the building so they could help onsite property manager Terry Arterburn, immediately afterwards. Some brought their families because they knew the building would be secure.

"They wanted to know what was going on with the building and wanted to be there if something happened," stated Manfred.

In the days after the storm a great camaraderie developed among owners

and staff members who pitched in and worked together. Without functioning elevators and two 27-story towers, this was no easy task for maintenance staff who cleaned out refrigerators in all the residences and made several trips a day up each of the towers to check on the building and the individual units.

Rosa Lott, who Arterburn affectionately calls "the unsinkable Molly Brown," took charge of cooking all the meals on a barbecue grill, something she's never used before, setting up a table for 22 in the lobby of the building.

"Food is always a good mediator even in bad times," shares Manfred, adding, "Although we all knew the staff here, it's not in the same way that we got to know them during this time."

When general managers from other buildings came over to see what was going on," Arterburn explained, "These people volunteered to stay with me," he says of his staff, "and I plan to take care of them."

