

TEAM *PORT ST. LUCIE* MVP

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Nov. 2, 2012

Service above self leads to Player-of-the-Month distinction for Public Works crew of five

Because of their willingness to place service above self and work in difficult conditions created by Tropical Storm Isaac in late August, five Public Works employees have been chosen as Team Players of the Month for September 2012.

No one, including the National Weather Service, expected the 10 inches of rain Isaac dumped on Port St. Lucie on Monday, Aug. 27. Four inches had fallen the day before, and the ground was saturated from several previous days of rainfall. The result was heavy flooding in several areas of the City, and many citizens were stranded in their cars or feared their homes would soon be flooded.

City Manager Greg Oravec says that when conditions are at their worst, we must be at our best because that's when our customers need us the most. He believes the five Public Works crew members were at their best that day and provided a great example of placing service above self.

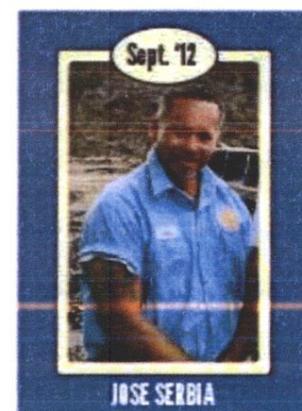
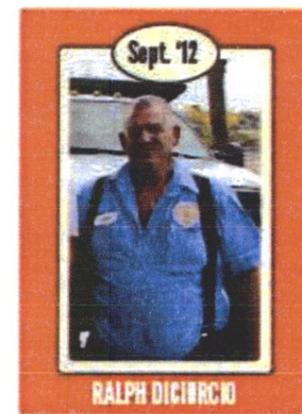
The Players-of-the-Month for September 2012 are Joe Velardo, Ralph DiCiurcio, Jose Serbia, Keith Minder and John Dunton.

After a 12-hour day of dealing with Isaac-related problems, the crew went home Monday night hoping to get some rest and prepare for what would inevitably be another busy day starting the next morning. But nature had other plans.

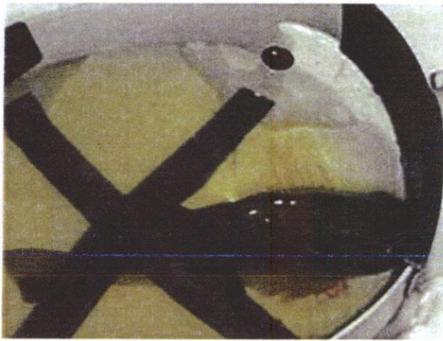
Late into the night, heavy flood waters in parts of St. Lucie West were not receding as they were elsewhere in the City. Upon a visual inspection, Mr. Oravec saw that the water was still rising in the Enclave development, threatening to flood not just garages but habitable space as well. At 1 a.m., he called John, known by most teammates as "JD," and said he needed a crew to respond as soon as possible. Within an hour, the full crew arrived, eager to get to work to protect residents and their property.

The crew impressed Mr. Oravec in several ways, including: how quickly and professionally the members responded, the demonstration of team work, the ability to work under pressure, the understanding of the mission's importance and their genuine care for the well-being of others. There were no excuses or "mailing it in." There was no referring the problem to the St. Lucie West Services District, which usually deals with drainage problems in the area. Instead, service came first, and they got the job done.

The water had risen so high out of the ponds that fish were swimming in the road. It was difficult work because of the darkness and what JD describes as a "hostile environment" of wildlife and deep water. He said there were snakes and fish swimming close to them while they worked. In fact, as the trucks drove through the high water to get to the outfall behind Lake Forest, a large fish was sent flopping onto a drier high point in the road and was spotted by JD and the City Manager.



Not wanting to throw the fish back into the water on the street, they put the fish into the only "bucket" they had, a hard hat (photo below). A few minutes later, the fish was released unharmed into the large lake between Lake Forest and the Turnpike.



This Red-Eared Shellcracker (a fish common in Florida) was swimming in the streets of SLW after Tropical Storm Isaac and was caught in a hard hat by Greg Oravec and John Dunton. It was released into a nearby pond.

JD is a project manager with the Storm Water Division of the Public Works Department, where he manages a variety of projects. He has been with the City for 27 years and worked his way up through several positions in the field, so he's no stranger to wildlife. He knows the City's drainage issues as well as anybody, and has expertise in the biology of South Florida waterway vegetation and land plants.

Joe Velardo is a supervisor in the Streets Division. He started working with the City in 1989 and assists in planning, scheduling and supervising the streets functions of the department.

Ralph DiCiurcio has been with the City for 11 years. As an equipment operator, he operates medium and heavy equipment, works on stormwater drainage swales, rights of way, greenbelts, drainage ditches and street maintenance.

Jose Serbia has been with the City nearly eight years. As a maintenance technician, Jose operates various types of equipment and performs important maintenance functions.

Keith Minder has been with the City more than seven years. He operates medium and heavy equipment, and works on storm water drainage swales, rights of way, greenbelts, drainage ditches and street maintenance.

Mr. Oravec believes that when things are at their worst for citizens, employees need to be at their best and need to get things done regardless of difficulties and obstacles. The drainage crew exemplified that standard while working until just before sunrise Tuesday morning, taking initiative, working with the St. Lucie West Services District and honoring their obligation to provide outstanding service to every resident of the City.

Congratulations to Joe Velardo, Ralph DiCiurcio, Jose Serbia, Keith Minder and John Dunton for being named Team Players of the Month for September 2012. Their effort is truly helping "to make the world a better place, starting in Port St. Lucie."

