Hurricane coverage
Harvey: How to help

What was the most clicked and searched for story following Harvey hitting Texas? This simple list of ways people can help Harvey victims, and similar stories.

It's a reminder that while we were searching for great narrative tales and surprising enterprise, it's our duty as a place of community record to tell people the simple things they want to know.

A corollary: The features section also produced two "Harvey Resource Guides" for print that collected useful information like how to apply for FEMA aid or how to remove wet drywall from your home. Not only were these guides something our readers wanted, but they were very popular with advertisers, so popular that our plan to do one became two when there was so much advertising it pushed most of the editorial content out of the first section. Again, it was simple info that's often forgotten when chasing the story of the decade, but it was very popular.

Houston Chronicle
This is an easy story to greenlight, an arts writer asking to tour the flooded downtown theater that serves as the flagship of a city’s theater district and write it in a way that transports you to the scene. That's not the lesson here, it's that stories like this can go wild online because of social media sharing. This story was one of the online high points during the Harvey coverage because seemingly every theater group in America was sharing it on their social media platforms. It's still tracking relatively well, weeks after it was published.

Houston Chronicle
One platform that did well for us was our Gray Matters online vertical. It's, basically, a site that focuses on intelligent discussion and dialogue about Houston. During Harvey, it became a way to mainline the stories and perspectives of people who help explain why Harvey happened, how it hit us so hard and the myriad ways it affected people - often in their own words. This story was one example that resonated with readers. A woman downloaded an app that allowed her to become a dispatcher for the Cajun Navy. It opened a window to the readers on some of the tragedy of Harvey, but also illustrated how technology has allowed anyone, from anywhere to help save people during tragedy.

Houston Chronicle
Here's the cover of our first Sunday features section, Zest, post-Harvey. While much of the week prior was triage reporting and production, this was our first fully formed, contemplated section aimed at capturing the spectrum of issues and emotions we were experiencing, while maintaining the integrity of our paper's coverage during the storm of the century. The centerpiece came from our food critic, Alison Cook, writing about how this was the first major disaster to Houston in the social media age, and how that connectivity informed us and saved lives. The page's other story is a behind-the-scenes look at how the city's preeminent museum planned to protect its timeless treasures, at the expense of personal property and family safety.

Houston Chronicle
Our managing editor, Vernon Loeb, used this vignette approach to chronicle random but connected stories from the storm on the website. We ported the idea to print, focusing on some of the “featurey” issues and narratives that came out of Harvey.

**TALES FROM HARVEY**

As the Houston Chronicle’s staff were sent throughout the fury and wake of Hurricane Harvey, reporting from flooded homes and comforting shelters, sharing tales of hope and heartache, we collected their stories on HoustonChronicle.com. Here are a few of the scenes our reporters captured during a week that will live in our memories forever.

**VIGNETTES**

Saved by social media

Janet and Eularis Moreno were trapped atop their jeep in the Bagmont area. Outside, they could hear Hurricane Harvey's torrential rains pelting the garage door.

“I prayed all night for the rain to stop. I counted the hours till the sun came up,” Janet, 79, says. “My husband would slide down the jeep, upside-down, to the garage door window to see what it was like outside.

“He said the water was chest high on 13th and I called all the people who would go by.

Calls are frequently dropped inside the Moreno home under the best circumstances and usually work best with WiFi. That wasn't working Saturday night, which meant no texts, either.

“My calls were in and out, my portable charger crapped out on me and I wasn’t able to get through any of the emergency numbers,” Janet says.

“I got through to one at 3:45 a.m. Sunday, and they told me we were fooded way, left after an hour-and-a-half of waiting. I gave up on them.”

For some reason, Janet, who chronicles an unwavering love for her daughter, decided to stay. She can't explain the decision.

Almost immediately, water began seeping through the walls and the floor.

“I was using a mark on the wall to gauge how fast it was moving. I told myself if we were going to get to that mark, then we needed to be worried,” she says.

“I looked away for a second, and when I looked back, the water had already reached that mark. We could hear things falling all over the house.”

The couple moved to the garage, climbed atop their jeep and saw the water submerging vehicles outside.

“I panicked,” Janet says. “I knew I couldn’t leave the house. I also knew I couldn’t stay in the house.”

A flood of memories

“I am heartbroken now,” my brother tested.

I knew before I enlarged the picture what he’d found in the ruins of his flood-damaged home: Daddy’s violin.

No one had mentioned it during the first days of the Harvey coverage.

Sam “Handbunters” Graham provides barber services to a flood evacuee at the George R. Brown Convention Center shelter.

enough to topple all the furniture, including free-standing cabinets that held valuable artifacts. After a harrowing 16 hours, a dramatic rescue and a day of figuring out what to do next, they had a loaner truck and a nice place to stay with friends.

Wednesday morning, after Chris saw wispy clouds in a brilliant blue sky, he texted a picture with the caption, “Thank you Jesus.”

The water had receded on his
Of the many stories/discussion that came up and out of that first week with Harvey was how Houston's favorite sons and daughters were handling and/or contributing to the situation. One of our writers, Andrew Dansby, mentioned how Houston native Johnny Nash's classic pop song "I Can See Clearly Now" suddenly feels more relevant than ever. I ran with the idea, suggesting he build it into an essay. The result was a little different element to our Harvey coverage, tapping into the cultural history of Houston to explain the moment.

Houston Chronicle
This is my own psychological emission, a reaction of how it felt to be commodified by social media and have our tragedy twisted into political or social currency. Like the Nash essay, it's as much about communion as it is enlightenment.

— Robert Morast, Houston Chronicle
You can't write about anything in Houston without mentioning barbecue. While this is a rather simple piece, it's just an example of how the effects of Harvey stretched into every facet of our lives. We wanted to try to tap into as many as these tangents as possible.

Houston Chronicle
We had written a few stories about the faith community's reaction to Harvey, including Joel Osteen's foibles. But this was a bit of enterprise born of a simple suggestion that felt almost profound. It's exploring how the faith community jumped into community aid while the government agencies were still trying to figure out what to do. It's another extension of the community togetherness narrative we strived to mine, but with enough of a twist to keep it fresh.

Houston Chronicle
And one from Irma:
During Hurricane Irma, we took to Facebook Live to provide storm updates, useful information and answer user questions. The great thing is, we got a sponsor for it! (ka-ching!) We produced about 18 shows in 7 days, and the features staff ran this production along with our video team. During the worst of the storm, we produced shows every 3 hours after National Weather Service updates. We used these updates to inform readers about the weather, but also information about power outages, pets, schools. We even had the sports editor on to talk about sports that had been interrupted by the storm. During the height of the storm, we had a special edition on our SouthFlorida.com entertainment Facebook page to play Pictionary as a stress-reliever (only the features department would think of that idea, and it was a blast!)

Storm updates:  
https://www.facebook.com/sunsentinel/videos/10154532548886887/

Pictionary: 
https://www.facebook.com/SouthFloridaDotCom/videos/1186140918184709/

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