

Message from our General Manager, Dr. Tom Quarles

Howdy! Hoping that everyone had as good of a summer as possible taking into account the very difficult weather event that occurred in late August and early September. Before providing the normal Expo event information for the last quarter of FY17 and giving a preview of the events that we have coming in the first quarter of FY18, I want to take this opportunity to provide some accurate information and diffuse various myths and/or misinformation that seemed to surface regarding the role that the Expo played in large animal sheltering operations and staging, housing and deploying a very large number of human resources and equipment resources during the Hurricane Harvey relief effort.

For information purposes, the Expo was prepared and ready, if designated/instructed, to accept large animals and companion animals from the evacuation areas (and other areas if necessary) as specified in the Brazos County Livestock Shelter & Mass Care Plan. It is even important to point out that the Expo was prepared/ready to do our part even before the hurricane ever made landfall. However, the Expo was not designated or instructed to open (that is not our management decision) as an evacuation shelter for large animals until Monday after the hurricane made landfall on Saturday morning. Regardless, no animals were ever turned away and the Expo ended up with 31 horses, most of which needed medical attention and first arrived at the TAMU Large Animal Hospital. As they were treated and subsequently deemed well enough, they were transported to the Expo for stalling and care in the West Pavilion. None of these horses were brought to Brazos County by their owners. All were rescued from the Jefferson County area. Only two or three eventually got matched with an owner while they were at the Vet School or Expo, but those owners were still not able to pick them up. From the time that they arrived, pictures were taken and were posted on multiple websites so owners who were looking for their horse(s) had a viable method to search for them on a daily basis. The Jefferson County Sheriff's Department and Houston SPCA were aware that the horses had been transported to the TAMU Large Animal Hospital and then subsequently to the Expo when medically feasible.

Most of these horses remained at the Expo for approximately 10 days before they were released, with permission given from Jefferson County to the Houston SPCA, and transported to their facility located in Hempstead. During the time they were housed at the Expo, they were observed/treated daily by TAMU large animal veterinarians. They were fed three times a day and watered as needed, in addition to being observed 24 hours a day (every day). All of this personal care was done by volunteers from the Brazos County Extension Horse Committee. Our hat is off to the committee members who carried most of the load in this important endeavor. Also, a huge "thank you" to the Extension Horse Committee overall for their continued and unwavering support of the Expo from the time that we first opened our doors for business in 2007. In addition, "thank you" to the Brazos County Sheriff's Department who also had a deputy assigned during the entire time that all of the relief efforts were being done at the Expo and to Brazos County Emergency Management which was so involved in the local logistics and coordination efforts. Finally, we want to recognize the TAMU Large Animal Hospital for providing the professional medical care for the rescue horses. It should also be mentioned that they were also caring for several more rescue horses that never were well enough to be transferred to the Expo.

In addition to the rescued horses housed at the Expo, we also served as a designated staging, housing and deployment location for FEMA, the Texas Task Force 1, and for both the Texas and Arkansas National Guard. This included hundreds of boats, trucks, search-rescue equipment and supplies that were also deployed with the state teams and the National Guard. The Expo staged and literally housed 12 different FEMA State Responder Teams and 18 different State Resource Teams. These 30

teams included first responders from many states, coast to coast in the United States, including teams from California, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland among many others and even a resource team with needed equipment from Puerto Rico. The teams were normally received by FEMA management, staged/housed overnight at the Expo and deployed the following morning. This was a very structured/organized and fluid process that took place over the approximate 10 days that FEMA was at the Expo. After FEMA left, the Texas Task Force 1, had a management group that also stayed and operated from the Expo for another three days or so.

As mentioned previously, the part of the Texas and Arkansas National Guard that were staged, housed and deployed at the Expo probably totaled a combined 2,000 troops. They also had a large number of support equipment and vehicles. As with FEMA, their operation was also very organized and fluid as they were staged and deployed by one or more military companies at a time. Each company numbered approximately 100 troops. Similar to FEMA, they were at the Expo approximately 10 days, coming/leaving about three days before/after FEMA.

There were several volunteers from the Bryan-College Station communities that did yeomen work in obtaining donations, preparing meals and generally doing all that could be done to take care of all first responders the entire time that they were at the Expo. It is also very important to mention that there were several restaurants in B-CS that donated very large amounts of prepared food for the first responders (sometimes as many as 400-600 meals at one time) periodically throughout the entire time. I would love to mention who they were, but won't at this time due to the risk of leaving someone out. Our hat is off to the community volunteers and restaurants that played such an important role in helping to accommodate those that were sent to the Expo to be deployed to serve the many people who were in need all along the Texas Gulf Coast and in the Greater Houston area.

Per the Brazos County Livestock Shelter & Mass Care Plan, when the Expo is designated to open and becomes a large animal evacuation/sheltering site, the cost per horse or other large specie of livestock is a one-time fee of \$20 per animal regardless of how many days they end up being sheltered. This amount had been recommended in the past, during Plan development, by Expo management. Of course, that is the fee when the owners bring them to the shelter and take care of them until they leave. The \$20 fee includes a bag of shavings for bedding, purchased by the Expo/Brazos County, staff labor required to keep the restrooms/stall barn(s) clean, trash picked up, trash receptacles dumped, manure/bedding placed in hoppers dumped daily (from cleaning stalls), electricity for lights and "Big A" fans in the stall barn, water/sewer costs allocated from the city of Bryan, fuel to run equipment needed to dump hoppers and the cost charged by Texas Commercial Waste to haul the trash/manure/bedding in the open top containers to the proper disposal sites. The one-time \$20 fee certainly is nowhere even close to breaking even on the fixed and variable operational costs that are incurred. It is simply a fee to help supplement the total costs incurred by the Expo, thus Brazos County.

During Hurricane Ike, several years ago, the Expo was a major evacuation/shelter site for large animals and we sheltered a large number of horses, all of which were brought in by their owners who stayed with them and cared for them. In that specific case, landfall was along the Texas coast to our East and taking them to a shelter to the West was ideal. Hurricane Harvey was completely opposite in terms of direction. As everyone knows, landfall was to our West so the Expo was not initially a primary shelter destination. Being on the wrong (East) side of the storm, not knowing exactly where it was headed and with it being a very slow moving storm, most would have been traveling into the teeth of the storm if they were trying to get to the Expo. Also, just to make it clear, with all of the horses and owners sheltered at the Expo during Hurricane Ike, with a similar one-time fee, there was never any complaints from the owners of the horses. All were happy, grateful for what was provided by Brazos County and appreciated having the facility, especially during such a difficult time.

In the specific case of Hurricane Harvey, since there was evidently some people, primarily on social

media, that were upset that anything was being charged, Commissioners Court decided to lower the cost to \$1 per horse. My understanding, per the Brazos County Auditor, is that some amount must be charged since county government is not allowed to just give away county assets or things of any value. However, as things unfolded in this specific case, the horses sheltered ended up being rescue horses that were placed at the Expo with no owners present at any time. As such, the Brazos County Extension Horse Committee committed to fund up to a maximum of \$3,000 in fees if needed. In our case, ultimately there were 84 bags of shavings (bedding) needed for the horses during their time at the Expo. The 84 bags at \$1 per bag (\$84) was paid by the Extension Horse Committee.

Needless to say, it was perplexing, frustrating and disappointing that a few people in the area vented their anger, criticism and other negative comments regarding Expo management and the Expo itself about the timing of being open for sheltering and the fee policies that were established quite some time ago. They certainly knew very little about the protocol, logistics, emergency management plans and the specific operational details involved. Unfortunately, that kind of thing happens occasionally when you are in the people business like we are. I will just sum these specific comments up by saying that we will always choose to take the high road and will handle ourselves professionally regardless of any misguided (in this specific case) or even deserved criticism that takes place.

Now, changing the subject back to the Expo and pertinent event information...For FY2018, we are currently gearing up for the largest number/sizes of events that the Expo has ever had. We definitely expect FY18 to be an awesome year! Our Phase III construction project is now coming along nicely and we are hoping to have most of it completed before the Brazos Valley Fair & Rodeo is held October 20-22, 2017. We have also finished doing some major improvements to our parking lots. It's hard to believe that the Expo is now 10 years old. As mentioned in the last Quarterly Newsletter, several faulty areas in the parking lot were saw cut, damaged asphalt removed and then patched with new asphalt. After patching, the entire parking lot was "fog sealed" and all lots and interior roads were restriped.

The expansion will allow us to book larger events, multiple/larger events on the same days and will primarily improve the overall capacity/quality of the facility for all dirt type events which include livestock shows, horse shows, other types of equine events (large barrel racing events, large team roping events, rodeos) and several other events such as circus, monster truck, concerts, etc. The major upgrade in both LED lighting and sound will have a positive impact on the quality of the experience that our guests receive while they are at the Expo.

Please check our event calendar, on the Expo website, www.brazoscountyexpo.com, to remain up to date with the volume/type of events that we are having at the Expo.

During the fourth quarter of FY2017, July through September, we hosted a number of extremely nice events. We had a regional Childcare Conference, the Bryan Breakfast Lions Club PRCA Rodeo, Vista College graduation ceremony, the Maroon and White Goat Sale, the Texas Health Occupations Association Conference, the American Red Brangus National Junior Show, the Josh Saculla Memorial Bull Riding event, the Saddle & Sirloin Steer, Heifer & Pig Futurity, Brazos County 4-H banquet, Horsemen's Market Day, Texas Senior Pro Rodeo event, the Brazos Valley Arts Council Celebrate the Arts banquet, Texas High School Region 9 Rodeo, Gulf Coast Arabian Horse Show, TAMU Construction Science Career Fair, Brazos Valley Fall Bridal Show and Benefit, Brazos Valley Council of Governments 50th Anniversary Celebration, Texas Inspectors Convention & Expo, Stock Horse of Texas Show, Elizabeth House Fundraiser, the All Aggie Rodeo, Texas High School Rodeo Association Region 9 Rodeo and several other events including, receptions and meetings.

During the first quarter of FY2018, October through December, the Expo will be an extremely busy event facility with several of the large events either lasting a week or the better part of a week. We will start off by having the National Cutting Horse Association Michelle Lynn Holsey Foundation

Event (including the competition, benefit and concert), the Texas Transportation Institute DDD Meeting and Fajita Fiesta, the Brazos County Extension Service Pizza Ranch, Texas Special Olympics Athlete Village, B-CS Chamber of Commerce Youth to Career Fair, the Teacher Retirement System Humana Benefits Conference, **the Brazos Valley Fair and Rodeo (October 20-22...a can't miss event that will be the largest and best ever)**, the Southwest Electrical Metering Association Conference, the Shriners Halloween Show, the Australian Shepherd Club of America National Specialty Show, the Young Life Brazos Valley banquet, Brazos County Extension Luncheon, 2017 TAMU Ducks Unlimited Banquet and Fundraiser, Still Creek Ranch Heritage Days Classic (horse show, ranch rodeo and much more) and Still Creek Ranch Fall Banquet, Texas High School Rodeo Association Region 9 Rodeo, the Texas A&M AgriLife Scholarship Banquet, the North Bryan Women's Club Debutante's Ball, Little Wranglers Barn Dance, Brazos County Benefits Fair and Employee Luncheon, the Central Texas Hunter Jumper Association Horse Show, the Superior Combative Championships, the Brazos Valley WorldFest, the Silver Spurs Fundraiser Event, the TAMU African Student Association Banquet, the Big Loop Big Money Team Roping Event, the Junk Hippy Vintage Market Event, Ben Hur Shrine Circus, the Texas Association of Saddle Horses of America Holiday Horse Show, K-12 Online Education State Testing, CHI St. Joseph Magic of Christmas Event, the Texas Quarter Horse Association Introductory Show and Clinic, S-Con Christmas Party, Mid-South Baking Christmas Party, the Texas Engineering Extension Service Holiday Reception, the American Cutting Horse Association Annual Championship Show and the Ranch Sorting National Championship Texas State Finals.

As mentioned above, please check the event calendar to see the quarterly Expo events scheduled and remember to visit our website, www.BrazosCountyExpo.com, to obtain more details/information regarding these and other events.

Until the next newsletter in January 2018, wishing each of you an enjoyable fall.