



Partners in Prevention

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Partner Spotlight – John Zarrella

Floridian John Zarrella is an award - winning journalist who covered nearly every hurricane to strike the U.S. in the past 35 years and was CNN's principal correspondent for the U.S. space program. He has reported on major news events for the network from the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City to the Gulf oil spill and a Mexico City earthquake.

FLASH: John, how did you get involved with FLASH?

ZARRELLA: I first got involved with FLASH before it was FLASH. I was covering Hurricane Andrew for CNN when I met Leslie Chapman-Henderson. At the time, she worked for the Allstate Insurance Company. I interviewed her on an overpass in South Dade County. As part of CNN's coverage of Andrew, we did several interviews. Leslie and I became good friends. When she launched FLASH, I used FLASH as a news resource for information about weather events. I also interviewed Leslie many times because of her expertise on hurricane safety and resilience. Leslie was, and is a great interview. Can't go wrong when someone knows how to talk in soundbites!

FLASH: What is your professional background and education?

ZARRELLA: I grew up in Miami Beach. I studied journalism and literature at St. Thomas University in Miami. I was the student newspaper editor. After graduating in 1972, my television career began first as an intern, and then as an assignment editor and weekend news producer, at WPLG TV in Miami. I worked at several local news stations in Miami, West Palm Beach, Atlanta, and Baltimore before joining CNN in 1981 as an executive producer. CNN brought me in to launch a morning news program, Daybreak. Two years later, I returned to Miami to open CNN's Miami Bureau.

FLASH: How did you get interested in disaster safety?

ZARRELLA: I trace my interest in disaster safety back to my years growing up in Miami. When I was a kid, we went through Hurricanes Donna, Betsy, and Cleo. Those experiences stuck with me. When I got into television, I had an urge to cover storms. My first was Hurricane David in 1979 followed by Hurricane Frederick that same year. I covered those for the Atlanta television station WXIA where I worked as a producer. I had to convince the news director to send me with the reporter and cameraman.

Then, of course, Andrew struck in 1992. That is where I saw the real destructive power of a hurricane coupled with questionable construction practices that made the destruction all the worse. My interest in resilience grew out of the stories of families who lost everything, families rebuilding, and recognition of the need to build back better.

FLASH: What do you see as the future of resilient building and what do you think is moving the cause of resilience forward?

ZARRELLA: I believe resilient building will be an ongoing struggle. There are too many special interests that prefer watered down construction codes. We have to continually call them out. We have to use the power of the media, weather forecasters, and news reporters to tell the stories of the importance of strong codes that in the long run save lives and money. That translates to less taxpayer dollars spent for FEMA recovery, fewer huge insurance claims, and less out of pocket expenses for homeowners. And, far less misery. The resilience charge must be led by responsible folks like FLASH as well as corporations, insurers, and government agencies. Resilience is not a one-hazard word. It applies to earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, fires, and hurricanes. Our challenge is to make resilience a story that is told always, not just after a major disaster.



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FLASH: Tell us about a specific project you are working on or are passionate about in the resilience field.

ZARRELLA: I am working right now on a fabulous project with FLASH and its partners. They are building a *HurricaneStrong* home for a woman in Breezy Point, NY, who lost her home during Superstorm Sandy. We have spent months documenting the construction showing how this home couples the best techniques, design, and products to create a home that is truly resilient. As an added bonus, its energy efficient. It's a project that demonstrates how you can build to a strong standard that will ensure your family's safety. The added cost is minimal for the level of upgrade and peace of mind.

(Editor's Note: John's participation in video production and other creative services has not only generated exceptional, new communication products for FLASH, but his contribution of keen insights and news instincts provide invaluable benefits inside and beyond the organization too. Thanks to John, we are growing our audiences and reaching them in a more effective way. You can view his FLASH and partner videos at www.YouTube.com/stronghomes.)

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