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April showers brought historical flooding this spring in Northwest Florida.

Nowhere was that more evident than in Jackson County, where Center for Homeland Defense and Security master's degree graduate Rodney Andreasen is Director of Emergency Management. Responding to the event required insight developed while at CHDS, such as collaboration and non-traditional, "out of the box" thinking.

The region was drenched by two waves of torrential rain, the first mid-month and the second a week later, affecting much of the Deep South. The storms were part of a weather system that spawned tornadoes in Arkansas and Mississippi on its march eastward washing out roads, damaging homes and forcing some residents to use boats to get to their property.

Almost three months later, the county is recovering from an estimated \$37 million in damaged infrastructure. Currently, about 90 roads are destroyed, underwater or impassable.

"This disaster is the worst that has ever been encountered by Jackson County," Andreasen said. "My first concern is to ensure I have the authority to take what actions I need to protect lives, property and ensure we have the necessary tools and equipment to meet the threat."

He did that with foresight, requesting a Local State of Emergency from his county commission a couple of days before the walls of precipitation began saturating the ground April 14. The declaration sparks to action mutual aid agreements and provides for requesting state assistance. Andreasen remained in contact with CHDS Executive Leaders Program graduate Bryan Koons, state Director for Emergency Management, during the entire process as he managed state operations at the direction of the governor.)

And long before the current floods, Andreasen launched a multi-agency effort to purchase weather radios for elderly and special needs residents. Andreasen began that effort upon taking the his job in 2001, working with neighboring counties and the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to obtain grant funding for a radio transmitter. In subsequent years, he secured funding for radios and the county's goal is to have 4,000 of them distributed to households so residents can receive alerts and notifications in inclement weather and power outages.

Seventy paved and dirt roads were damaged, flooded or rendered impassible by April 22 after the second, heavier rains hit (eventually 90 would be damaged). That was followed in mid-May with FEMA approval Individual Assistance for the county and that a Regional Intake Center (RIC) would be established for the county.

"Several homes located in areas that had never seen any flooding issues began to see water encroachment early in the initial assessment," Andreasen said. "Flooding is still occurring as the ground remains saturated and the aquifer is fully charged for our area. The water has no place to go."



Rodney Andreasen

The county was declared eligible for FEMA's Individual Assistance program in May, but plenty of work remains. To fill that gap, the county is collaborating with numerous non-profit organizations and volunteers.

"FEMA assistance can only go so far and we have reached out to non-profit agencies to assist in rebuilding individual property," Andreasen said. "This would include roads and homes for those not covered under infrastructure guidelines and individual assistance programs. We continue to monitor operational environments at this point and respond as needed."

The influence of Andreasen's CHDS education was prominent throughout the response, especially in terms of inter-agency collaboration, planning and molding important agency relationships long before disaster strikes.

"In Jackson County we have an excellent record in coordinating with all agencies at the local and state levels," Andreasen noted. "Without the ability to have those contacts established and the willingness of partners to work together, we could not meet our responsibilities. These were established beforehand and paid unbelievable benefits in response to the disaster."

A critical concept from CHDS was thinking in non-traditional ways and questioning conventional wisdom of the progression.

"We were able to develop a picture of the danger we faced and were able to meet the challenge to respond," Andreasen noted. "All in all the response averted loss of life and mitigated a lot of property losses as well."

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