

Remembering The Deaf Community During The Hurricane

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When Hurricane Katrina hit thousands of people were stranded and confused. Not just because communication systems broke down, but because they are deaf.

When communication systems failed during Katrina, evacuees say it was chaos and they could hear what was going on. It was an even worse scenario for the deaf community, 9,000 people in Louisiana alone.

Jennifer Fields, a student at RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf, doesn't even want to imagine what that would be like. Through her interpreter, she said her family had to evacuate their home in Louisiana. She's thankful she wasn't there.

"It would be truly emotional because hearing people don't know how to communicate with deaf people; it would just be so difficult," she said.

Fields is getting ready for the possibility of helping some of the deaf students in the Gulf Coast who can't go back to their local schools.

Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz, Dean of NTID, said, "If students do want to transfer here to NTID, we'll right away remove all the red tape to allow those students to continue with their education."

The school has also contacted colleagues in the region telling them they'll make arrangements for special housing and financial aid. They haven't heard about any incoming students yet, but they're ready and can't wait to help.

"I think they would understand I'm here to help them and that they could ask me anything. I'd be more than happy to help with anything they needed," he said.

The school isn't just reaching out to students. It sent out a letter to alumni in the Gulf Coast whose jobs may be in jeopardy.

The letter reads, "Our center on employment wants to help you and can help you get back on track."

Students at NTID have also been raising money for the deaf community in the Gulf Coast and one of the faculty members is on "stand-by" to go down there and counsel them.