

Aerial views of the damage to the New Jersey coast caused by Hurricane Sandy taken during a search-and-rescue mission by the New Jersey Army National Guard on Oct. 30, 2012.

U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO/MASTER SGT. MARK C. OLSEN

AERF Needs Your Ongoing Support

By John Perkinson, Staff Writer



Crisis can dramatically alter our circumstances in a moment's Notice. Take the effect of last October's Hurricane Sandy on the ALPA Emergency Relief Fund (AERF) as a prime example. This Association resource, which benefits members and their families who fall victim to widespread disasters, was nearly depleted due to the volume of calls for help following this devastating event.

"The challenge in administering this kind of program is that people don't think about contributing to it until an event actually occurs," said Capt. Ed Lowry (ExpressJet), AERF president and former ALPA executive vice president. "When images of the destruction caused by a disaster like Sandy appear on the nightly news, the public realizes that others are in need and wants to get involved and help out. The problem is that, at the same time, AERF is getting requests for grants, so the money from these incoming contributions goes right back out the door, preventing us from ever building up the fund."

To avoid scenarios like the one created by Hurricane Sandy, which nearly depleted the fund, AERF needs members to contribute on an ongoing basis.

And without sufficient reserves, an extremely large crisis or even a series of catastrophes occurring in a brief timeframe could easily overwhelm this important member benefit.

Dark clouds on the horizon

Hurricane Sandy, a Category 3 storm at its peak, blasted through Jamaica and Cuba before heading north toward the United States last fall. Sandy made landfall on Oct. 29, 2012, near Brigantine, N.J. The storm surge in nearby New York City swamped streets and tunnels

and flooded the city's subway system. The region experienced prolonged power outages, and damage in the United States alone was estimated to be in excess of \$71 billion.

"Council66," the Delta pilots' New York local council Facebook page, kept members apprised of airport conditions and operations. One post read, "LGA—Photographical data show all of LGA covered with water and most lower levels of the facility flooded. Items of


concern will be no lighting available for nighttime operations and assessing the pier and asphalt strength for operations."

The message continued, "Damage assessment has not begun fully, and updates are due from the Airport Command Center shortly. Airport is without power, and backup generators are on. Pax levels in terminal are fine, and the employee lot is flooded."

The Air Wisconsin pilots' *LEC 50 News* reported, "Hurricane Sandy affected many ARW pilots in some way, whether it was being extended/rerouted, junior manned, stuck in places while the storm passed, or, in some cases, flooded vehicles, damaged homes.... Our thoughts go out to all who are struggling through the aftermath to rebuild and repair."

Meanwhile, AERF directors Lowry, F/O Chris Gromek (United), and F/O Mark Segaloff (Continental) were answering calls from pilots. The three were also meeting periodically with Capt. Bill Couette, ALPA's vice president—administration/secretary, who serves as AERF liaison, and with the Association's staff to discuss the plummeting AERF balance and what contingencies existed, if AERF resources were completely exhausted. ▶▶▶

When in Need

To learn more about the ALPA Emergency Relief Fund, make a donation, or request a grant, visit www.ALPA.org/relieffund. Contributions are tax-deductible in the United States. 

“Insurance claims are extremely limited in what they cover, claims take time to process, and it can be very difficult to get the money from these outfits,” he pointed out, adding that AERF helps fill the gap until claims are paid.


Segaloff, a B-737 pilot, remembered one pilot whose elderly father lived with him and his family. The pilot applied for and received an AERF grant to pay for generators needed to power medical devices.

Gromek added, “People don’t realize how traumatic these events can be. They forget that there are families behind those doors. You may see it peripherally, but you can hear the stress in their voices. You can’t help but want to do all you can to help them get back on their feet again.”

Ongoing challenge

AERF has been in existence since Hurricane Katrina and has helped victims of a variety of disasters, from California wildfires to Wisconsin floods. Family members of the crews of the First Air Flight 6560 and Colgan Air Flight 3407 accidents received AERF assistance.

The fund is a tangible benefit of ALPA membership and has made a difference in the lives of hundreds of ALPA families, but its availability depends on you. AERF relies solely on donations.

“To avoid future scenarios like the one created by Hurricane Sandy, AERF needs members to contribute on an ongoing basis,” said Lowry. “Regular donations would bolster the fund, particularly during periods when there is little or no demand for aid. Only with this kind of commitment from ALPA members can the AERF board establish and maintain a reasonable fund balance to ensure that when catastrophe strikes, AERF will be there as one more shining example of pilots helping pilots.” 



Granting assistance

AERF is a nonprofit corporation established to provide ALPA members and their dependents with financial grants to help alleviate the immediate hardships resulting from a widespread disaster. While insurance claims can take weeks or even months to process, and assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the United States and Emergency Relief Organizations in Canada is not always available, AERF grants are intended to address the immediate needs of victims of declared disasters to help expedite the recovery process. Requests can include reimbursement for temporary housing, medical expenses, child care, primary residence repairs and debris removal, and other expenses. For a more complete list, visit www.ALPA.org/relieffund.

In Sandy’s aftermath, Gromek, a B-767 pilot based in Washington, D.C., said, “The fund was overwhelmed with requests, but, fortunately, a number of individual pilots and two ALPA MECs [master executive councils] stepped up to help us when we needed it most. We were able to award grants to all of those pilots whose circumstances fell within the guidelines of the fund charter.”

Sizeable donations from the United Pilot Unity Fund and the Delta Pilots Charitable Fund literally saved the day, helping the fund meet immediate demands while also providing a buffer for future events. AERF awarded tens of thousands of dollars to help more than 30 pilots and their families.

Local perspective

Gromek noted, “I grew up near the Jersey shore and know the places where many of the pilots were calling from. I heard stories of severely damaged houses and properties destroyed. There was no electricity. Homes had their gas cut off because the local authorities were worried about leaks and possible explosions.

“Winter was approaching, and once these people got back to their homes, they didn’t know if they would have heat. These pilots had to find temporary places to live. As difficult as it was for the adults, it was even harder for the kids. We tried to help everyone out as quickly as possible. There’s so much to take care of when you’re told you have to leave your house immediately,” she added.

Segaloff commented, “Several of the pilots I spoke with lost everything. Their houses were totaled. Insurance compa-