



FEMA



Lessons Learned from Katrina: Retail Store Takes Action

Hattiesburg, MS - When Hurricane Katrina struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, businesses were damaged or destroyed, houses were reduced to debris and concrete slabs, and communities were left stunned. One business hit hard was Hudson's Salvage Stores. Ironically, Hudson's sells merchandise from other companies that have been damaged by some sort of disaster.

Of the 39 Hudson stores in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana, half were destroyed or had significant water or wind damage. Those stores that did survive could not be immediately reopened because their employees had evacuated before the hurricane. More than 350 Hudson employees lived in the area affected by Katrina.

To stay competitive in business, owner Bill Hudson and partner Rob Roberts have learned lessons quickly, and are taking steps to minimize damages and losses from future storms.

"This was my most fearful experience, and I survived," Mr. Hudson said. He had no hurricane plan in place prior to Katrina. "Frankly, I didn't know if there was ever going to be a Hudson's again. By learning from the past, educating ourselves and our employees, we will be better prepared to protect our families and the company in future storms," he added.

Based in Hattiesburg, the retail chain is now committed to providing educational resources to both its employees and residents of the community. Some issues of the company newsletter, "The Hudson Times," are dedicated to hurricane planning and preparedness.

Mr. Hudson has also partnered with FEMA to distribute preparedness publications to customers and employees at 19 stores in south Mississippi, and to host outreach teams at selected stores in the state. "This year, instead of hoping the storm doesn't hit, I am going to expect the storm to hit. The number one answer is education and it's important to have a strategic plan in place for the company," asserted Mr. Hudson. "I had no idea that crisis situations like we experienced would arise after a storm like Katrina. There are preventive measures that will be in place this year. Planning ahead will guarantee that necessary resources are in place."

The company was without electricity for many days after the storm, and there was a fuel shortage. Subsequently, Hudson's now has generators and a fuel station to keep the company running. Mr. Hudson also plans to let his employees off one day earlier than recommended by authorities to give them more time to evacuate before a storm.

A quick recovery of the firm's two divisions, Hudson's Treasure Hunt and Hudson's Dirt Cheap stores, is good for the overall community as well, Mr. Hudson said. The Small Business Administration (SBA) agrees. "The sooner a business can recover from a disaster, the better it is for its employees, customers, vendors, and the community," said Kathy Cook, an SBA government relations specialist. "When we save the small businesses, we save the economic base of the community. We all have a stake in the recovery of small businesses and need to practice preparing for disasters."

Forrest County,
Mississippi



Quick Facts

Year:
2005

Sector:
Private

Cost:
Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:
Education/Outreach/Public Awareness

Primary Funding:
Business Owner