

## LOOK UPSTREAM

SEPTEMBER 2008

### BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE STORM

Hurricanes and their attendant "cone of uncertainty" – each posing the threats of wind damage and more so flooding within the Cypress Creek Watershed – bring to mind an interesting letter written by a son to his father after a hurricane 90 years ago. It reads as follows:

HONORED SIR,

I take up my pen, just to give you an imperfect account of one of the most dreadful hurricanes that memory or any records whatever can trace, which happened here on the 31st ultimo at night. It began about dusk, at north, and raged very violently till ten o'clock. Then ensued a sudden and unexpected interval which lasted about an hour. Meanwhile the wind was shifting round to the southwest point, from whence it returned with doubled fury and continued till nearly three in the morning. Good God! What horror and destruction - it's impossible for me to describe - or you to form any idea of it. It seemed as if a total dissolution of nature was taking place. The roaring of the sea and wind - fiery meteors flying about in the air - the prodigious glare of almost perpetual lightning - the crash of falling houses - and the ear-piercing shrieks of the distressed were sufficient to strike astonishment into Angels. A great part of the building throughout the island are leveled to the ground - almost all the rest very much shattered - several persons killed and numbers utterly ruined - whole families wandering about the streets,

unknowing where to find a place of shelter - the sick exposed to the keenness of water and air - without a bed to lie upon - or a dry covering to their bodies - and our harbors entirely bare. In a word, misery, in the most hideous shapes, spread over the whole face of the country...

*Alexander Hamilton at 15 years, in a letter to his father. From Virgin Islands: Our New Possessions and the British Islands, by Theodoor DeBooy and John T. Faris, 1918.*

Legislation signed last year – 9 decades later – by Texas Gov. Rick Perry has made Rice University home to Texas' first research center focused exclusively on predicting and planning for disasters caused by hurricanes and tropical storms. The devastation and havoc wrecked on the Gulf Coast a year earlier by Hurricanes Rita and Katrina made the need for such an academic and public partnership to deal with such disasters never more apparent. The Independent Insurance Agents of Texas are reported to have identified 405 chemical and refining plants around the Houston-Galveston area and that a Katrina-like storm hitting the Port of Houston would jeopardize over 850,000 jobs and, "may result in losses of more than \$130 billion to the Texas Economy"<sup>1</sup>.

This new center – the Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disaster Center, or *SSPEED* – is charged with organizing universities, researchers, emergency managers and private and public entities to better address severe storm impacts along the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coast. The Center Director is Dr. Philip Bedient, the Herman Brown Professor of Engineering and one of the nation's foremost experts on urban flooding

"The SPEED Center will put Houston on the map as far as hurricanes and severe storm research are concerned, as well as focus attention on the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coast to hopefully attract the resources that will be necessary to better prepare for flooding and hurricanes," said Center Co-director Dr. Hanadi Rifai, associate professor of environmental engineering at the University of Houston<sup>2</sup>.

*Look Upstream* articles are provided by the Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition non-profit, community grass-roots organization as a public service. Visit [www.ccfcc.org](http://www.ccfcc.org) for more information on needed flood protection, environmental preservation, flood insurance and membership or send an e-mail to [floodalliance@ccfcc.org](mailto:floodalliance@ccfcc.org).

<sup>1</sup> "Ready or Not", article in *Cite*, Summer 2007, published by the Rice Design Alliance, Thomas Colbert, Director of Graduate Studies, University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture.

<sup>2</sup> Texas establishes regional severe storm research center, SSPEED is state's first hub for storm prediction, evacuation, disaster research. By Jade Boyd, Rice News staff, 06/02/2007.

