

“It Looked Like an Atomic Bomb Went Off”



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Lumen Teams Work to Get Things Back to Normal in Storm-Struck Louisiana

As Hurricane Laura began to pound the outer shores of Cameron Parish, Louisiana, last August, Lumen Technologies Network Tech, Tyrell Boyer, prepared to ride out the storm at the DeQuincy central office. At roughly midnight, the most powerful storm to hit the state since the 1850s ripped the roof off the building, forcing Boyer to scramble to cover the electronic equipment from lashing rains.

Wet and exhausted, Boyer headed home after his shift, only to find a tree had landed on his house.

A colleague, Plant Technician Ryan Isaac, faced a similar fate. Several trees hit his house, portions of his roof had blown away, and extensive water damage was everywhere. Six months later, his family still only lives in one half of his home.

“The amount of damage is unimaginable,” he said. “It looked like an atomic bomb went off. Every other house had a tree on it.”

Stabilizing the Network

Laura was only the beginning. Three tropical storms pounded Louisiana over a three-month period, and a fourth, Hurricane Sally, came ashore in Alabama. Troy Goergen, the Field Operations Regional Manager for the Lumen Disaster Recovery team, monitored each storm, deployed recovery equipment, and made sure there were enough boots on the ground to get things done. In the case of Laura, one set of those boots belonged to Goergen.

“The primary goal is to keep the power on, so that consumer and commercial networks stay live. We made sure we had enough portable generators in place, that fuel trucks were available, and we had spare parts in hand to repair and maintain the generators on site,” he said.

Seventy-five generators were needed to keep the network running in the area on both the consumer and enterprise side. Despite the devastation, network crews kept Lumen core fiber assets in Cameron Parish operational after Laura came ashore. Network diversity helped minimize the impact for customers nationally.

Isaac Boyer, and another local colleague, Plant Technician Frank Lorenz, spent most of their time travelling between locations to ensure the units were fueled and operational. Simply getting around was a challenge, as fallen trees and flood waters blocked many of the roadways. Zeta and Delta, the two storms that followed Laura, complicated local repairs.

Ralph Huval, Supervisor of Regional Operations, said he had never seen anything like this.

“First, you need to repair the central office, then the critical circuits, like cell towers, and then you go out and start reconnecting people. As soon as you start digging through the install orders, it seems like you keep finding more and more people who are out,” said Huval.

Fieldwork leads to Teamwork

Goergen and his team brought cots and sleeping bags, so they could camp out on site until commercial power could be restored. Huval’s team went out of their way to make them as comfortable as possible.

“Ralph’s team was great,” said Goergen. “They brought us food and those techs that had power allowed our guys to come to their homes to use the showers. Never been taken care of better.”

As Boyer, Isaac and Lorenz turned their attention to installs, they were impressed by the overall resiliency and patience shown by residents in the area.

“They were super happy to see us. They would offer food and drink. They even offered to help us with the installs,” said Isaac.

Huval says at one point his team was managing three-times their normal workload. Only now are things starting to return to normal in Cameron Parish.

“I’m proud of my team. They had to face both personal and professional challenges to get the job done,” added Huval. “Hurricanes are a learning experience, but here’s the most important lesson. You trust your people and do your best to stay safe.”

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