# History

**of the**

# U.S. Food and Drug Administration

**Interviewee:** Carol Sanchez

**Interviewer:** John P. Swann, Ph.D.

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**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES** Public Health Service

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FDA SERVICE DATES: FROM: 1974 TO: Present

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Interview with Carol Sanchez

New Orleans District Office

Temporarily Relocated to Nashville

September 12, 2007

TAPE 1, SIDE A

JS: This is an interview on September 12th, 2007, with Carol Sanchez of the New Orleans District Office, temporarily relocated to Nashville, and this is an interview about the Hurricane Katrina experience.

As we start, what I'd like to find out, Carol, is how you came to be at FDA, and where you were in FDA and what you were doing in the agency up until the time you arrived in New Orleans.

CS: I have a checkered FDA past.

I started with FDA in 1974. Where did I start? Buffalo, well, Syracuse, New York, Buffalo District, and then I transferred to New England. I worked in a number of locations within New England, and then in 1985 I went out and opened the Santa Barbara, California, Resident Post.

I got married, adopted two little boys, took some time off from FDA.

I went back to work for FDA in 1990, in Portland, Oregon, then went to San Juan, Puerto Rico. And while we were in San Juan, my ex-husband was very unhappy, so I got

a transfer back to California, to San Diego, and we got back from California at the end of August, beginning of September of ’91.

In November of ’91, my youngest son, who was five at the time, had a brain tumor, and so I dealt with that for a little bit.

We moved back to Santa Barbara. We were in Santa Barbara, and my son had some significant issues, so he and I moved to San Diego so that he could attend a special school in San Diego for kids with brain injury. And the day he graduated from high school, I accepted a job in the spring as the Director of Investigations, New Orleans, but I basically told Ty, when he offered me the job, that I wouldn’t come till my son graduated from high school because I had sweated blood to get him to the point of getting a high school diploma and I was not going to jeopardize that under any circumstance for anything. And Ty was very understanding, so they waited for like five months for me. And on the day he graduated from high school, in the middle of June, we hit the road, and we got to New Orleans.

We moved into our new house, and we got hit that first week with Tropical Storm Cindy, and I got some moderate damage from that. I was still like feeling my way around the office in New Orleans when they started talking about Katrina coming, because I’d only been there for two months; Katrina was coming, and I was not going to evacuate. I’m a very stubborn woman.

JS: Let me ask you something. Where was your house?

CS: It’s in Gentilly. It’s off Saint Bernard Boulevard.

JS: Okay. And that's in Orleans Parish or . . .

CS: In Orleans, yes. A great house with a swimming pool. My son and I were going to be very happy there forever.

JS: One story, two stories?

CS: One story. He was three miles to the community college that he was going to attend, so he could have taken public transportation because he can't drive because of his disabilities. So we were set. And we hadn't even finished unpacking.

JS: So you still had things in boxes.

CS: We had things in boxes.

The Friday before the storm, when they were talking about it getting worse, I had taken the day off because every room in my house had a ceiling fan, except one. There were four bedrooms. One of them didn't have a ceiling fan, and that was the one my son chose. So I had taken the Friday before the storm off to have the electrician come and install the fan. And he did a nice job. We used it for two nights.

And I was working around the house and I got an allergic reaction to mold, so when I woke up on Saturday and they were saying evacuate, evacuate, my face was totally swollen from an allergic reaction.

JS: The mold was in your house?

CS: Yes.

JS: Already.

CS: Yes. It's very damp and humid in New Orleans, so around the ceiling or the air condition vents, there was mold, and I wanted to -- I didn't know if it was getting worse or better or just static, so I thought, I'll clean it all up, repaint the vents, and everything will be fine, and then I'll be able to evaluate whether or not I have a problem or whether this is just old mold.

But I had an allergic reaction, so my face swelled up. I mean, it was just huge, and I wouldn't go out in public.

I did finally go out because after Cindy, the tropical storm, I was without electricity for five days. That was my first week in New Orleans. So I purchased a generator because I wasn't going to be without electricity for five days again. So I purchased a brand-new generator, hadn't even like put it together, and I thought, all right, well, this storm is really going to come; I'm going to go buy gas for the generator. So in my puffy face, I went to the gas station, and I thought, well, as long as I'm here, I'll fill up the car. So I got gas for the generator, I filled up the car, and I went home and took some more Benadryl and slept. And we're still not going to leave. I was prepared for the electricity to go out. I put together the generator and . . .

JS: This is Saturday.

CS: This is Saturday. And I was still staying.

Sunday morning, when the news said if you are going to remain in New Orleans, you need an ax to cut your way out of your attic, I thought, with a handicapped son and two cats, there ain't no way I'm hanging out in my attic, on my roof. So I put them in the car Sunday morning, and we drove away.

JS: Now, had you ever had any related experience? I don't know where you grew up. But had you ever had any experience like this before, dealing with this kind of a meteorological event like this?

CS: I grew up mostly in New York, so as a child, we were in the winter fairly often; we lived in the country, so we were fairly often snowed in in the winter for three to five days. I was a stewardess years ago. I was snowed into Plattsburg Airport for five days. So those kind of meteorological things I had experienced. I'd lived through an earthquake in California. We had a fire in California, in San Diego, that came within a quarter of a mile of our house, and when we drove away from that, because I could see the fire, I was pretty sure we were going to lose everything we owned. And so . . .

JS: Did that experience in particular, evacuating, teach you anything? I mean, did it offer any advice on what you take with you when you leave?

CS: I wish I could say that it had, but absolutely not, because I really thought the worst I was going to get was maybe a foot of water in my house, and everything would be fine.

And so when we evacuated in California because of the fire, I had all of our insurance papers, our birth certificates, our passports, you know, tons of work. I mean, the trunk was packed with clothes for work and my son's video games and things to keep him occupied while we lived in temporary housing in a hotel after our condo burned down, because I was sure that's what was going to happen.

When we left for Katrina, I took nothing. I didn't take a pair of clothes -- I mean, I took a pair of shorts, a pair of jeans, some tennis shoes because I thought there'd be branches down and maybe some broken glass when we got home, so I'd need like long sleeves and long pants. But I didn't take our birth certificates, our passports, our insurance papers, work clothes, nothing. We were going away for a weekend, and we were going to come home and do mopping-up. I was wrong.

JS: Where were you going?

CS: Nowhere. I mean, I really had nothing in mind. I knew I had to get out of town, so I got in with the flow of traffic, which was going north. And we were sitting in traffic because it was horrible. And we were sitting in traffic when Ty called and said, "We're going to activate the COOP [Continuation of Operations Plan]. We're going to Nashville," and I thought, oh, well, now I have a destination. This is a good thing.

So I said, “Fine, I’ll meet you in Nashville.”

And we drove and we drove, and we’d been on the road for probably 14 hours when I couldn’t keep my eyes open. It was not 14 hours of moving, but it was in traffic.

And we stopped in -- I started trying to stop in Tuskegee, and I tried for a long time. We finally found a hotel near Huntsville, because otherwise we were just going to stop and sleep on the side of the road, but we had two cats in carriers who needed to get out and go to the bathroom, and I didn’t want to do that. So we made it to near Huntsville, and then the next morning we got up to come to Nashville.

And by the time I had gotten to Nashville, I thought we were in the clear, and we were just going to turn around and drive home. But then the dams decided to break, so that was the end of that.

JS: Yeah.

So the Friday before this happened, you were off anyway dealing with the mold problem. The hurricane had been in the Gulf even before that. In fact, I think by that time it might have moved across Florida. But I think most people thought that it was going to make a turn to the north and go up the Florida Panhandle like several of them had already. So this was quite a surprise.

And there probably weren’t a whole lot of preparations going on in the District Office for this in terms of making sure records are set aside, although I understand your IT person came and recovered the backup tapes for the main server.

CS: And some of my supervisors who’d been through evacuations before -- Carolyn

White and Don Hall -- they went in and they made sure that the government cars were moved, because where our government cars were parked was in a secure cage on a lower level of an area near a bayou, I guess, and so whenever there was going to be a hurricane, the plan was you moved the cars up to the top because at least they won't flood. So they were in the office and they got the cars all moved out of the bottom to the top, thinking that they will be somewhat protected, just flying debris. And they had taken their laptops and things. And I had my laptop home with me because I was doing some work. But we really didn't like batten down all the hatches and prepare because everybody had been through it numerous times, and it was just sort of an exercise: move the cars, you know. I mean, there were a lot of people who had their credentials in the office, who had basically a lot of the stuff they needed within the office, because they weren't, I mean, no one was prepared for this.

JS: By the way, had everything arrived at your home by this time? It may be unpacked, in an unpacked state, but everything had arrived, your furniture and so on?

CS: Yes. Everything was there.

JS: So, by Monday, by the time the hurricane actually made landfall, you're in Nashville.

CS: Yes.

JS: Tyler is in Nashville.

CS: Yes. Tyler and I were the only ones here. We were the only ones who came immediately here as management, as part of our team. Patt Schaefer, the DCB, probably should have come here, but no one was able to reach her.

But once we realized that there were significant problems, the first thing we tried to do was reach our staff, to make sure everybody was safe. But, of course, home phones weren't working, cell phones weren't working, and not everybody thought to call Nashville or anywhere. So there were, I don't know, probably four or five days when we still hadn't accounted for everybody.

JS: As far as you know, was everyone aware, I guess from standardized procedures, that they should call Nashville if something like this happened?

CS: We had COOP plan, which is Continuation of Operations Plan, and we thought they all knew that.

JS: That's stated in this COOP plan.

CS: Right.

JS: That you call New Orleans if you leave.

CS: Right.

Our plan is twofold. The supervisor, you know, managers call the people they supervise, and then we work our way down. So our entire system was set up relying on telephone calls. And so my first calls were to the supervisors that were in New Orleans, trying to reach them so they could call their people, but of course I couldn't reach them because they weren't sitting at home waiting for my call, thank God. But they also, their cell phones weren't working, and so I couldn't get to them. And so then we started trying to call everybody -- our lists of employee contacts have their home numbers and their cell phone numbers if they've chosen to give us their personal cell phone numbers. So then we just started trying to call.

And a few people did actually know the plan and they called Nashville. Very good. Most people didn't. And we just kept trying and trying and trying.

And then, because this was the first disaster of this magnitude, we really didn't have good procedures. I don't know that we do now, but we really had bad procedures then, because the first thing, someone would call in, if they called in, and we would just say, "Oh, great, you're alive. Thank God. Where are you?"

And they would say, "Oh, I'm in Houston."

"Okay, fine."

But we didn't think to get contact numbers. And so after our initial contacts with some people, we weren't able to reach them again for days because we had to wait for them to call back in because we didn't get their contact information -- you know, we

were just so happy they were alive that we didn't think about, well, what happens when we need to talk to them again. It's just, "Oh, thank God, we heard from so-and-so."

JS: So the issue of how to contact them again, much less the issue of, gee, it looks like we might be in Nashville, were somewhat forgotten about when you were thinking, well, glad to hear from you.

CS: Exactly.

JS: And planning, I've got to call the next person.

CS: Yeah.

You know, "I heard from so-and-so. They're fine. They're in Houston." And I was like, whew, that was good. And, I don't know, it was probably four or five days before you actually heard from the last person.

And when we were able to, when we finally could say everyone's alive, which was a really big deal . . . I mean, I make light of it, but it was a really big deal. When we were finally able to say that everyone was alive, then we were able to say, "Okay, now what?" because until that point, our only goal was finding those last two or three people. And once that was accomplished . . .

Well, before that was even accomplished, while that was still going on, we were dealing with the states, because they lost people and contact with people. We were trying to deal with Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama to make sure that they were okay.

JS: That their staff was safe?

CS: That their staff and everything was okay.

JS: Okay.

CS: And that once we got breathing again, we could then start to worry about the industry.

Of course, Headquarters was worried about the industry from day one. We were thinking we'll get there; we'll worry about that later. And one of the investigators at the time, the supervisor, David LeRay -- and I don't know if you're going to be talking to him . . .

JS: This afternoon.

CS: David was phenomenal because he's been through -- he's Louisiana born and bred -- he's been through evacuations and hurricanes. And so the first thing he did after he went to where his parents were and got them safe on this Monday or Tuesday, he was already at the state, working with the State of Louisiana.

He is outstanding. I can't say enough about him.

So he was our fist online contact about industry, because in the beginning, I really didn't care about industry. It was not my priority. My priority was my people.

And so, David was there and working with them.

And then we brought everybody here, which wasn't well-received.

JS: In what way?

CS: People had evacuated to many locations. A lot of them evacuated to where they had family, Texas or northern Louisiana or northern Mississippi, whatever. So they had evacuated to where they felt safe. And I understand, but it wasn't easy because they were where they felt safe and relatively okay and had no idea, because none of us had any idea for sure, what happened to our individual houses, because we all had the hope that our one little house or our one little street didn't flood, and so . . .

JS: Did you find yourself maybe looking on, Googling, or looking to see if you might recognize your street from a helicopter shooting video above New Orleans or something?

CS: Yes. But I hadn't been there long enough to even have an idea of what it would have looked like, you know. It's like, okay, well, there's City Park. I'm on this side of City Park, but which street? So I was at a disadvantage, perhaps, or maybe it was an advantage. But we were all kind of doing that. But for those of us, for Ty and I, we didn't have a lot of time to focus on that part of it.

And so when we decided that, okay, it's been five days or 10 days or whatever --I honestly don't know the chronology -- well, we're not all walking back into New Orleans

in the next week or so, we need to bring everybody in here. And so a lot of people were really angry and very, very upset.

JS: So the supervisors heard about this.

CS: Yes. And we may have made a mistake because we gave sort of a script to the supervisors who were here, because I had three supervisors in New Orleans, and they were scattered. And so the supervisors, the two guys who were here, were the ones who ended up making the phone calls to everyone, including those supervisors saying, "You need to get to Nashville and we'll pay your mileage, we'll put you up in a hotel," blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. And they weren't real understanding, and they kind of just read a script, and it didn't go over well with a lot of people.

JS: So you think maybe the way the message was delivered could have been done in a slightly different way?

CS: I think we could have been a little gentler. I think there were a lot of people who would still be angry because they . . . I mean, they were trying to determine whether or not they had lost everything they owned. And now, and they're sitting, even if they were sitting in a hotel . . .

There were a couple of people who were very happy to be told to come to Nashville and be on per diem because they're sitting in the hotels, running out of money, you know. And so they were, there were a few who were very happy to be told, "Come

to Nashville. We're putting you on per diem." But they were in the smaller numbers than the people who indicated, "I don't want to come to Nashville, it's too far away. I need to be able to get back down there and find out what's going on." So telling them they had to come to Nashville wasn't exactly what they wanted to hear.

JS: Just so we know, at this time in New Orleans, I guess certainly the worst places, like the Superdome and the Convention Center, had finally, finally been evacuated. But I guess at some point they told people they can't come in. I mean, it was flooded, so people . . .

CS: Right, it was still flooded.

JS: It was still flooded. People, even if they hadn't issued an order saying stay away, it wouldn't have made any difference because there would have been no way to get to their place, I suppose.

CS: Right.

JS: Of course, I suppose when someone leaves like that, leaves everything there, they're not really thinking about the practical ways of dealing with a situation like this.

CS: Right. And many people just felt like they needed to see it, you know: "I want to be down in that area. So the moment they say you can go in, I can go in."

JS: Even though you're management, the same thought probably occurred to you since you were there.

CS: Well, it did until I actually finally looked at the overhead pictures with the water that's at six feet in the entire area where I lived, and I realized there was nothing to go home to, so I could stop worrying about that for a while.

But I tend to be pragmatic, I guess. It's probably the nicest way I could put it.

I've moved a lot with FDA, and I've been through some personal problems with my son, who was supposed to die. Thank God he didn't. And so I tend to be able to let go. "Okay, fine, we're through with that. Okay, fine, we don't have any possessions anymore, but we're here, we're safe; the cats are here, they're safe; nobody died that was a family member," so we were blessed.

And my situation was different because even though I loved my house and I was really, really happy with it, it wasn't like Marion (Ferrante), whose house she just finished paying for, you know. I had bills up to here. That didn't change. And so even though I liked it, I, for lack of a better word, hadn't bonded with it. I mean, it wasn't -- you know, it was home, but it wasn't like *the* home. So I was a little, probably a little better off than a lot of people because I wasn't born and raised there.

JS: Right. But when you moved to New Orleans, when you took the job, when you took the position, I mean, did the attraction of New Orleans itself play into this at all?

CS: Yes. I would not have, at that point in my life, if they had announced that, yeah, I'd be positioned in Nashville, I would not have applied. I wanted to live in New Orleans. Even though I had read all of the information about the crime rate and various other issues, I wanted to live in New Orleans. And the fact that we were basically walking distance or biking distance for my son . . . that was why I bought where I bought, so my son could get to school without depending on a car. But it still wasn't the same as, you know, this is the house that I've lived in my whole life and that I raised my family in. It's a house I moved into two months ago, and I think that's different.

And I've moved a lot, so moving is not, moving without owning anything is different, but moving to a new location and establishing new routines and new work, people and things was not as big a challenge for me as it was for some of the others.

JS: So, arrangements were made with the New Orleans branch. I gather that record-setting times were arranged to get space for the staff.

CS: Right.

JS: I mean, how long does it take to get the office back and running up here?

CS: I don't know that it ever really was. Don't tell my boss that.

JS: Well, while acknowledging the fact that so many people are here, and they're here

physically and they have computers in front of them, but are they here, you know, full time?

CS: Some of them still aren't. I mean, that's just how it is. People have different bounce-back rates, and at least one person is still not here, hasn't been able to move forward.

But as far as getting the office established, it was, I don't know, faith, whatever. But, I mean, we were able to get office space basically in the same building, I mean, the building next door. We got rental furniture and we were up and running in what we call the annex, probably within two weeks, which is unheard-of. We'd been trying to get a new office in Baton Rouge for, well, I've been here two years, so at least two years, but I think it's more like five, and we still haven't succeeded. So, I mean, the reality is that Headquarters came through, and everybody just sort of pulled together to make it happen.

And the fact that FDA -- I'm going to cry if I think about it, but FDA went above and beyond what I'm aware of of any other agency did because we brought our entire staff and their families. We put them up in Residence Inn. We gave them per diem for all the family members, and some of them stayed on that for six months. And then they went on FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency], and there are a couple who are still on FEMA. But we're talking two years down.

JS: That decision was made at Headquarters, in the ACRA's [Associate Commissioner for Regulatory Affairs] office?

CS: Yes. I mean, I think Tyler and Gary Dykstra were kind of the driving forces for that because we've got to get people back and engaged, and we have to give them meaningful work. I mean, part of it's pragmatic. We can't pay, continue to pay people to do nothing in Houston, to do nothing in Atlanta. You usually can do that for a little bit while you're finding your footing, but eventually, when you realize you can't go home, then you have to move. Where do we go from here? And between . . .

JS: So we were never really -- sorry, but I just wanted to ask -- so the agency, as far as you know, was never really seriously considering farming out the staff to the Houston Resident Post or to offices . . .

TAPE 1, SIDE B

JS: The plan really was, from the get-go, to have the office relocated to Nashville.

CS: Well, I mean, I don't know about from the get-go, but from the time we knew that New Orleans flooded, yeah. It wasn't an option of one person lost the roof of their house and the rest of us have damage, but we all have a place to be. Once we knew that the levees had broken, the city had flooded and was sitting in water for a couple of weeks, then, the moment that the major flood happened, we were on the phone with Headquarters, going, "Okay, guys, now what?" because it's not like . . .

Even in California, if you have an earthquake -- if you have an earthquake in San Diego, our preparation always was you would go to Los Angeles and you would work from Los Angeles.

Our COOP plan was if we had something go wrong in New Orleans, we would come here, but we never expected and I don't think anybody's plans ever were that you would come somewhere and stay. It was like you'd come for a few days and then you would go back. But there wasn't much to go back to.

So Headquarters and Ty and we all kind of decided that we're here. There was enough logical space, and most of the other districts . . .

You know, actually, our other employees weren't all happy. It was the best thing that we could do for them, because if we had simply said, okay, you're in Houston, you can report to the Houston office, those same people would be like I was here: in a hotel, no clothing, and on their own expense. So by bringing everybody here, it put everybody, you know, everybody had food, I guess. Nobody was running up credit-card debts that they would take the rest of their lives to pay off, because, I mean, you couldn't even go back into the city for, oh, it was over two weeks, and then only with I.D. And, of course, I still didn't have a license that said Louisiana, so I couldn't go back anyway because I couldn't prove I lived there.

JS: I want to get to that.

CS: But, so, for our staff and for the agency to do what it did and bring everybody here and take care of "family" was an amazing thing.

JS: Do you know if other federal agencies that have a presence in New Orleans, did you hear anything that anyone did anything like this?

CS: Some of them just transferred their people to other locations, as you had said, and they were basically on their own. Some of them gave longer times before people had to become accountable, and so some of them went for two or three weeks without reassigning or redoing. But I don't know of any other agency that did what FDA did, which was bring everybody together and try and . . .

And it wasn't, I mean, it wasn't for work, because we didn't get anything out of anybody for months, I mean, as far as work, because they were just emotionally devastated, a lot of them. Some of them still are. But, I mean, it wasn't like we brought them here and we gave the investigators assignments and said, "Go out and do this inspection." We brought them here; we had counselors come in . . .

JS: Did a lot of people take advantage of the EAP [Employee Assistance Program] program?

CS: A lot of them did, not everyone, but I think the majority at some point or another had some contact with the EAP, and some still do. I mean, this isn't something that, okay, now it's two years, you're done. It's like losing a family member. There's no guideline for when your grief is done or how you deal with that, and so some people still need that. And I fully understand that because it's, I mean, it's a big loss.

JS: So, I'm curious. With so much of the staff quite distracted, talk me through the process of how the work gets done in a situation like this.

CS: Well, for the work on the coast, we brought in people from around the country and from here, investigators from Tennessee went down and worked in New Orleans. We didn't send any of the New Orleans investigators back to New Orleans to work because (a) they wouldn't have been able to focus, and (b) it would have been really hard not to go to your house and do something rather than do work, because that's who we are. And so as far as like trying to verify that bad food wasn't being sold and medical drugs and biologic products that needed to be kept at certain temperatures -- that those were protected and off the market -- we sent other people.

And so the staff that came here, the investigative staff that came here, we gave projects like official establishment inventory updating and things they could do with part of their brain while they were making phone calls to their insurance adjuster, family members, FEMA, Red Cross, all those things that you can only do during the day. So we kind of just like put blinders on and let them do what they needed to do because that was what they needed to do. Those were things. And so we didn't really pressure the people who'd evacuated to do things.

JS: What was the situation with the states, with Louisiana, with Mississippi, with Alabama, and so on, and their food and drug responsibilities, especially with respect to

the things that we do jointly with them? Did it take a long time for that to get back online?

CS: It was dicey. They lost -- and Louisiana was the most impacted because of the New Orleans flood -- so they lost not only track of their people, but they lost a couple of people. I mean, there were a couple of people who died. And so they were short-staffed. They wanted us, as in FDA, to do more, and they had a really awful director at the time who, thank you, has retired.

JS: Is this the state Food and Drug?

CS: Yeah. And so we met with them on the phone every day. We had people down from Atlanta and various other parts of the country working there with the state, and we had David LeRay, and we had a lot of people. Our Baton Rouge office was still intact, so our investigators at Baton Rouge were still there working with the state. And we were trying to coordinate with the state, but the state was as distraught as everybody, and so they kept asking for impossible things and making impossible demands of FDA, like give them three boats and dah-dah-dah-dah-dah-dah. And we kept having to say, "We can't do that, but we will do this." We didn't have enough resources. So we shipped a bunch of people down there, and then they were complaining because there were too many people and they didn't have enough people to give them instructions. I mean, there was a period of probably a month when working with the state was sheer hell. It was horrible, I would say, because I was on those calls while Tyler was on all of the logistic calls for

Headquarters. I was on the calls for the state, going, "Stop complaining. Don't yell at me. If you yell at me, I will hang up. I am doing the best I can do." And it was dicey for a while. But we got through it. We eventually managed to figure out a way that the state could be placated somewhat.

But they had very impossible demands, and they wouldn't write the paperwork correctly. So if they wanted to get something from FEMA, like if you get extra money from FEMA to help pay for some of the stuff they were doing, they have to prepare a proposal, and it's not that difficult. But they would say, "Need assistance."

JS: That's it?

CS: Yeah. I mean, really. And I'd go, "You have to say how many people you want, where you want them, what you want them to do, because otherwise no one's going to touch that paper." And they would, you know.

So we have two investigators, Barbara Wright and Dana Daigle, who were in Baton Rouge, so they ended up writing the FEMA request for the state because we couldn't get the state to do it right.

JS: But just so we make it clear here, these are activities that the state normally would carry out itself, right?

CS: Yes. You know, one of the first goals for the state was to get -- and it makes sense -- get the restaurants reopened, get the grocery stores reopened, and those are areas

that we don't routinely deal with. So we brought in retail specialists from all over the United States to work with the state, because it was also relatively unsafe, so you couldn't just go by yourself. And so the state wouldn't, they wanted to go to all these places, but they didn't want their investigators alone, and they wanted our investigators, like misery loves company or safety in numbers. I'm not sure. So we brought our people in, and they paired up. And so they did.

They visited every retail establishment. And, of course, most of them, when we first got there, were still boarded up, bombed out, whatever, and so then they'd have to go back. And then we'd put notes on their doors, you know, "When you come back, call this number so that we can get you reopened." And that was the state, and I understand that. I mean, that was the initial desire. And that's not a function that we normally perform, but we did. So our investigators from here who went down weren't doing the manufacturers or the wholesalers or anything because those were far away from the immediate needs. So they would go out with the state and do restaurant inspections or retail establishment inspections.

JS: So they'd do these with state officials, with local municipal officials, like in New Orleans, say?

CS: Yes.

JS: Okay.

CS: So it was, it was different. I mean, this was something that was totally different from anything FDA has ever done.

JS: There are no manuals written for this.

CS: There are no manuals. It's like, you know, we'd just kind of rub our heads and go, "Okay, what do we do now?"

Our Director of Compliance, we couldn't reach her. She was actually partying somewhere in northern Louisiana, but we managed to come back and tell everyone we won't . . .

JS: Your Director of Compliance from . . .

CS: From New Orleans. We couldn't reach her either time at RI. It took her five days to call us. But she finally did; eventually, she got here.

But we sort of invented things as we went along. And it worked, I mean, maybe not as well as it could have, but it worked.

JS: So, were staff being pulled in from most of the regions around the country?

CS: Yes.

JS: Pretty much everywhere around the country?

CS: Everywhere. They originally started with the retail food specialists because that was the identified need. But there aren't that many retail food specialists. So then we started pulling in investigators, the Public Health Service, because that's part of their mandate, so a lot of Public Health Service . . .

JS: The Commissioned Corps.

CS: The Commissioned Corps. So a lot of them were the initial responders.

We did very creative things. One of the Commissioned Corps guys here has a recreation vehicle.

JS: An SUV or something?

CS: A trailer that drives, a camper, I guess you'd call it. Because there were no rooms at the inn, he took his camper down with some guys, FDA people, and they lived in the camper. So, we were doing things like trying to find campgrounds. It's like, "Okay, today your job is to call campgrounds. Find us a place to park Steve's camper. He'll be there in two days. You've got to have it. He has to have a place to park."

You know, trying to find hotel rooms, bargaining with people for hotel rooms. Some company would have a hotel room they weren't using, and they agreed that they

would give it to us -- we would just pay it -- because if that company checked out, then it goes on the FEMA list, and FEMA doesn't consider us important. And so even though FEMA had blocks of rooms all around the state, they wouldn't give FDA access to them. It was a very bizarre system. So we would barter with people. It was like, "Okay, we'll use your room for three days, and we won't go to the front desk." It was very different.

I think for me, personally, and for my son, who is semi-handicapped, it was difficult after spending about five days of living in a hotel hotel room -- it was a La Quinta.

JS: So I gather not everyone was at the Residence Inn.

CS: Well, the Residence Inn didn't start until September 4th.

JS: Okay. So when you first came out here . . .

CS: And we were on the 29th, so we were like the first people. So we had the Residence Inn set up . . .

JS: But you had a room.

CS: Yes. So, I mean, I came in and checked into La Quinta because it was close, but it was me, my son, and the two cats.

And so, and I was working. Basically, I would come in here like at 6:00 in the morning, and if I got home at 7:00, I'd consider it was good. And, of course, my son is sitting there in the hotel room with nothing to do except pet the cats for 12, 13 hours a day, watching the news. And his handicaps are not physical as much as they were emotional, and I thought, I can't keep doing this.

So I called a friend in California, who's like his sort of foster grandmother, and said, "Can you take Brandon?" and she said yes. And she said, "And I'll take the cats too." So I put him and the cats on a plane and sent them to California for a couple weeks because I couldn't have him sitting there, and I couldn't do an eight-and-a-half-hour day and then go home because there was too much to do. So I sent him back to California, and then I had to listen to him bitch because he didn't want to be there and he wasn't happy, so . . .

JS: But it surely must have been better than sitting in the hotel, though.

CS: He's very mom-dependent, so it wasn't necessarily the best thing. And Grandma Cathy can wear him out. She's like, "Okay, come on, let's go. We're going now." And he needs like, you know, you have to tell him that in 10 minutes we're going to do this, and she can't quite get there.

So the first break I had, I flew back to California and brought him home.

But at least during that first couple weeks he was gone, so I could focus, because it just wasn't working out well. He kept saying things like, "What about my football card collection? What about my" -- and I've forgotten the guy's name, but his autographed

baseball, Tony Gwynn autographed baseball. "What about . . ." and I'm going, "Gone" "What about this video game?" "Gone." So it took him a long time to realize that . . .

And then he would say things to me like, "When we left for the fire, you were better organized."

I'd go, "Yeah, you're right, I was. Oh, well."

So we learned a lot.

JS: At what point do we start focusing attention in the District Office on the sort of issues with the farmlands, the fisheries, the commercial interests? I mean, I don't even know. Are they even online themselves after the storm?

CS: Some of them are still gone. I mean, some of the oyster beds are going to take years to recover. A lot of the shrimpers lost their boats. So a lot of the "stuff" is still gone. It'll never, you know, it may recover someday if we don't have another major hurricane. But those kinds of things were the normal, I mean, it sounds horrible, but they're the normal hurricane things, where you have things that get wiped out every time there's a big hurricane. It's the way it is. They're used to it.

It was the flood that really was more compelling, I think, the flood and then Rita, you know, marching in right after Katrina that devastated the coast even more. But, I mean, we were dealing with those.

The Mobile, Alabama, office was intact, and the investigators were fine, so they were going out almost immediately to the crabbers and the people, processors, in that area, and then we were working with the state. Once we got the retail sort of under

control, then we were working with the state to look at the other product lines. But, I mean, some of the damaged coffee is still being reconditioned. It's like it'll go on forever.

I mean, it started relatively quickly, but not by the New Orleans stuff per se, but by us sort of orchestrating with the state and working forward.

JS: There was one case I remember seeing in the situation reports, where a shipper in Alabama sent over 100,000 pounds of shrimp to Florida, and they found, I guess, we found out that part of this shrimp shipment had been submerged in the floodwaters and thus, I guess, was adulterated.

CS: Yeah.

JS: I mean, did we see much of that in the first month or two after the storm?

CS: Yeah. After about the first two weeks, there were people trying to recover whatever they could recover.

JS: Without the agency's knowledge.

CS: Yeah.

JS: Okay.

CS: You know, trying to move things that shouldn't have been moved.

We had a lot of to-do about, and it sounds strange, but about drugs. There were 18-wheelers that were used to move dead bodies, and how do we decontaminate a tractor-trailer? So that, you know, involved us for a while. It's like, are there guidelines for this? Where do we find them?

JS: I notice there was a discussion about that in particular in the situation reports, and at the time, I recall their wanting to keep quiet about this. They didn't want people to know that they were thinking about reconditioning morgues for food. Right?

CS: Yeah. The last time we were meeting with the state, I think they still have 1,800 unidentified bodies or body parts that they have in storage. Thank God I don't have to worry about that, because at some point they're going to have to dig a mass grave or do something, and they're not prepared to do that. But, I mean, we couldn't really talk about the tractor-trailer trucks that we'd used as morgues or used to move bodies openly, because then everybody across the entire country will stop eating. If they can't pluck it out of their garden, they're not eating it. So those are things that sort of had to go underground a little bit because you cannot ever get people to understand that there are ways to decontaminate.

I mean, the airport itself -- part of the airport -- was a morgue. Part of the airport was an emergency hospital. And when they were trying to reopen parts of the airport,

they had to tear up carpeting and do things because there were bodily fluids. I mean, it's just not normal.

JS: I remember talking to one of the staffers here about using the airport shortly after the time of the hurricane, and it's not something he wanted to do again.

CS: Yeah. It was just, it was nasty. But it was above water. It wasn't flooded. So you do what you have to do.

JS: Yeah.

Do you think Headquarters appreciated . . . I mean, obviously, they had a concern for the employees and, as you said, they really extended themselves as far as accommodating the employees here once they were in place. Obviously, they were very concerned, as you all were here too, about getting back to the business of the FDA here in the field. Do you think they kind of appreciated what the staff was going through as they were trying to get back online?

CS: I think some of them did, and I'm not sure that -- you have to have a certain amount of empathy, I guess, to be able to put yourself in that position. But I think a lot of Headquarters did understand. I think a lot of the individuals in Headquarters understood that you can't ask those people to do something right now because they're not ready. But we can send these other people to do it, and that'll be fine. And they provided the resources and the necessary approvals.

Once we were bringing our people here, as Director of Investigations, so my biggest problem became, "What am I going to do with them? All of these people have lost all of their inspectional equipment." I mean, they didn't really lose it because we were on the fourth and fifth floor, but we couldn't get there because you couldn't get into that building. And so even after the floodwaters receded, it was a couple of months before we could get into that building, and then you couldn't take much out because you had to do it down the stairs.

JS: Right. Were you involved in the recovery?

CS: I was involved in the coordination, but I didn't go down there because I had too much else to do here. But we did send some of our New Orleans staff down there to help sort that out. I mean, they worked in horrible conditions.

The first time they went down, it was to get personal items, and that was all it was. It was not to get anything to do with work. Everybody lost -- it sounds silly -- but everybody lost all of their photograph albums or pictures of the kids when they were little, so some people had some of that in their offices. For our initial visit into that office, they had to climb stairs; they went with lists of personal items that people really wanted, and they gathered them up and they carried them down five flights of stairs and brought them back up here. And it made people feel a little more comfortable in their new space, that the picture that was on their desk was now on their desk again. And that was what we did first, bring back the personal stuff, part of it, not all of it. Some people had far too much stuff. But enough stuff so that people could feel connected a little bit.

But Headquarters -- I said, "I need equipment. I mean, eventually I have to put these people back to work. They don't have anything." And so we worked and we developed a list of everything they needed, and they started purchasing and sending to us.

JS: You mean inspectional equipment.

CS: Inspectional equipment. They did an outstanding job. In fact, we're hiring new people now and we're using that list that we developed during Katrina to say this is what investigators need, because no one in the agency had ever developed a comprehensive list. So Gerry Miller and I, we spent hours and hours on the phone.

JS: Well, let me just say I would love to have a copy of that list to know what inspectors need, because we collect inspector equipment in the museum collection.

CS: History office.

JS: Yes, we do. And it would be fascinating to see what's on that list.

CS: Okay. I can do that. I can print it out.

Basically, Gerry and I duked it out about what do we really need, and I tend to be brazen, and so I said, "Well, the reality is that, I'll be honest, in New Orleans the previous DIBs [Directors of Inspection Branch] hadn't really equipped their staff very well, so as long as we'll be ordering equipment for me, I want to make sure everybody has what they

really need. But I can't do that just for the few people who lost everything in Katrina. So I need 44 sets because that's how many investigators I have," and he just kind of rolled his eyebrows, and we continued to negotiate. And in the end, he did it. So all of my investigators got the same packages of stuff, which was good.

JS: How long did that take?

CS: I don't think we even started on negotiating until probably three or four weeks into the process, and things just kept coming in. Every day a tractor-trailer truck would pull up and start delivering things. It was like Christmas. And that was one of the things that the New Orleans investigators carried out -- one of their busywork tasks -- to assemble the stuff into kits. So they had it all staged out and they would assemble kits, and that was one of their busywork tasks, so it worked out pretty well.

So, I mean, it was just an interesting time.

JS: Obviously, you're working very closely with people like the DFI [Division of Field Investigations] back in Headquarters and other places to get your staff the equipment that they needed.

TAPE 2, SIDE A

JS: So I was saying this gives very useful insight in how the office gets up and running and working with districts around the country, working with Headquarters to get

the equipment that you need. Obviously, the staff here, that are located here, have IT type equipment.

It takes a while for this city to get things organized so people can go back and see what remains of their lives that they left. When did you go back?

CS: I went back in whatever the holiday is in October.

JS: Oh, Columbus Day.

CS: Columbus Day. I wasn't ready to go back before that, to be honest. I already knew from the pictures that there wasn't anything there, and so . . .

JS: You went back by yourself?

CS: I went back by myself, but we have an Office of Criminal Investigations down in Mandeville, and Mike Niemiec, who's the head of that office, a sweetheart. I stayed with him and his wife and his two little girls, and he went over with me because he said I shouldn't go alone, and so he went over with me. But that was the earliest I was able to emotionally go back.

And it was not good. I mean, some of it was funny. We break open the front door, we go in the front door, and . . .

JS: You had the markings on the house?

CS: Yeah. And, in fact, I have pictures on a disk.

It was actually kind of funny because I'm looking down at the floor, a glued parquet tile floor, and it was everywhere. I had a lot of family antiques -- I had been entrusted with their history. But I'm looking down at the floor and there's this plastic bag, and I'm thinking, what the hell is that? I pick it up, and it's a vacuum-sealed bag of tilapia. And I'm thinking, what is this doing in the living room? How did it possibly get in the living room? And then I realized that the refrigerator is tipped over and open, and so all the stuff in the refrigerator had floated wherever it wanted to go, and it happened to go into the living room. So that was kind of intriguing.

My swimming pool, which was beautiful when I left, was halfway empty and black because of evaporation, and obviously there was no electricity, so it wasn't filtering.

And so I managed to get dishes that were above the waterline. Everything below the waterline had water like sitting in it still, and I was like, no. And you have to go in. You couldn't get to the kitchen from the front of the house because the refrigerator was on its side blocking the door. But you could get there from the back of the house. So we went through the family room and then into the kitchen. But you have to take a deep breath outside, hold your breath basically. I was wearing a face mask, but, I mean, the stench was overpowering. And so you have to go back through to hold your breath and grab a pile of plates and go back out, breathe, go back in.

The longest time Mike and I spent there were in two places. One was my storage shed because I had some antiques in there, glassware that I was willing to give up and Mike wasn't, so he kept looking, and it was intact. It was amazing.

But the longest time we spent was in my son's bedroom. All of his cards and things were shot, but we were trying to find his autographed baseballs and his autographed footballs, and we did find some of them, but the stitching had broken because they had absorbed water and grown. Not all of the autographs had gone off, so we were able to actually -- I took him back two of his autographed baseballs, which was a nice thing to do.

JS: He appreciated having those.

CS: Yeah. But in the meantime, his Grandma Cathy had actually gotten hold of Tony Gwynn and gotten Tony Gwynn to sign a ball for him to replace it. So he got that one too.

But it was just, it stunk. There's no other way to put it.

JS: How high was the waterline?

CS: It was taller than I was, I mean, because you can see the waterline, and you can see the waterline from the pictures. And the back was all glass looking out over the pool, the family room was all glass, and you could see the line, water.

JS: You'd just moved in. Did you have the insurance that you needed to?

CS: No one told me that you really should insure your second mortgage. The bank requires that you have flood insurance on your first mortgage, but nobody mentioned -- and I wasn't very smart and didn't realize -- that it's good to have flood insurance on the second mortgage amount. And when they were talking to me about the flood insurance and how expensive it was, and they said it's replacement value -- not replacement value; that's what I have. Had the hurricane wrecked things, I would have been in great shape. The flood, however, was a different situation.

So when we were talking about the price, what it was going to cost me for flood insurance on the contents and that it was depreciated value, I thought, oh, screw it, it's old, you know. Most of my stuff is old, has no real value. So I only had $20,000 of contents insurance.

The adjuster who met me there that Columbus Day weekend opens the back door, looks in the family room, and said, "You've got $20,000 worth of stuff in this room alone."

I said, "Just write me a check for $20,000. It's my fault. I was stupid."

Again, what am I going to do? I made a mistake and I've learned a lesson, an important life lesson. And it's like, I did it to myself, so I have nothing. So I let the house sit like that basically. Everything was still inside, and we just walked away.

And everything was still inside it and still moldering and nasty. Between the $20,000 for contents insurance and the flood insurance, I was able to pay off my first

mortgage. So I paid off my first mortgage; and I was still making payments on the second mortgage. I was still paying insurance as well. And then I realized that things were only going to get worse in that house because all those wet, nasty contents were still in there.

So I found a guy through another friend who would clean it out. I paid him like $3,000 to empty the house and take it down to the studs, and so he did that. And then he called and said, "I'd like to buy your house."

I said, "This is what I owe on my second mortgage. Give me the money for the second mortgage. The house is yours."

So he gave me enough money to pay off my second mortgage, and I walked away. I mean, you can forget about the contents and memories and things. I walked away not any deeper in debt than I was before. So I was actually lucky considering how stupid I was.

And then the government paid for my hotel and my food and everything else from September to February, when I finally was able to buy a house and we moved in. So I didn't have any utilities, didn't have a mortgage, so I was able to buy furniture with the money that I was able to save from not having those bills. It's not good furniture, but it's furniture. It's like I furnished my whole house for what I would normally have done a living room for. But you know what? I have furniture, so I'm not complaining.

It's been interesting.

JS: So you're settled in Nashville now.

CS: Bought a house. When I bought my house, I still owned the house in New Orleans, so it's not anywhere near as nice a house as I had in New Orleans. My furnishings aren't anywhere near as nice. But it has a fenced back yard. We've acquired two dogs and a four-year-old in the last few months, so it's like, my family has grown considerably since I've been in Nashville. We've doubled our family.

JS: I guess the only thing left that I would ask is -- obviously there are things you would have done differently as far as the insurance issue goes.

CS: Yeah.

JS: But in terms of how the agency dealt with this, both at the District level and what you observed outside, say, at Headquarters, are there any kind of lessons we could learn from this in terms of things maybe we did right that we should always try to do again if we can, or things maybe we can improve on?

CS: Oh, things we could improve on is how we communicate with the employees. Once we've decided that we're changing their lives yet again, we could probably be a little gentler.

We've already improved as an agency because now there's a little laminated card everyone has so that if there's a catastrophe and you can't reach your manager . . .

You don't have the laminated card?

JS: I don't have the laminated card.

CS: You need a laminated card.

It gives an 800 number that rings back at headquarters' and instructions have been given to people. Whether or not they'll follow them is another story, but the instructions have been given to people that if there's a disaster or an emergency or anything that you can't reach your manager, then call this 800 number. And these are the kinds of things we need to know: where you are, how we can reach you. Those were big lessons.

I don't think that, as far as the relocation and everything else, I hope that's a lesson no one has to learn. I mean, I lived with the threat of earthquakes in California and hurricanes in Puerto Rico, but I don't think anyone from an agency or from a city -- I mean, New Orleans always knew we could flood, but we didn't really know that; it's just gossip. And so I would hope that we never have that kind of disaster on a national scale again that requires us to rethink what we do and how we do it, because it was definitely a challenge.

But I can't think of any agency I would have rather have been through this with than FDA because FDA, I mean, went above and beyond. I mean, as far as I'm concerned, everybody pulled together. And I'm sure that there are some people who still probably don't think that, but they're the same people who want to go back home when all that's left is a slab. The reality is that I think FDA has been amazing as far as trying to get people back on track emotionally, financially, and physically, I mean, to keep the job going.

Preparing a disaster-response kind of thing, the reality is that no matter how well you plan, there will be some nuance that you couldn't possibly have considered. I mean, it never occurred to us that the supervisors couldn't use our call-down list and call people. I mean, it just never occurred to us. It never occurred to us that we would leave and never be able to go back to our office.

JS: That hasn't happened before. I don't believe it has.

CS: And the reality is that we have not learned those lessons probably as well as we should, because now we're talking about putting all of the IT servers and everything in Headquarters. And in that area, I mean, if we have a terrorist attack, that area is probably the last place you want to put all your servers and store all your data. But we're moving in that direction, and it's like, guys, what if? And we all want to think this isn't going to happen, and we're definitely putting all of our eggs in one basket; and how do we live from that? We still don't have our files, our physical paper files from New Orleans.

JS: I thought those were recovered from the office, I mean, as many as were . . .

CS: Yeah. They were actually recovered, but it's taken us two years, and we're right now, we have them downstairs and we have people who are working on them, trying to get them actually filed, because we weren't prepared to handle what you do about your paperwork. And we were lucky because we used Documentum and we store all of our reports on a computer, basically, on a server, and we scan everything. So we are actually

able to stay in business and function without our physical files, where most districts couldn't do that.

JS: Those paper files are scanned for the most part?

CS: Yes. Everything, well, Nashville came later than New Orleans, but I think even in Nashville, for the last two years everything that's been done has been scanned. So the paper files are the exhibits and there is some redundancy, you know, the Notice of Inspection, the hard copy and stuff. But when we've needed to look up something about a firm, you know, firm history, we can go into our Documentum.

Now, of course, everything that was there was stored on the fourth floor of the building, so we couldn't get at it. But when they were able to get into the building, they were able to carry out basically a CPU that had all our inspectional data on it. I hated Documentum until then. Now I have a bigger respect for it because it allowed my staff to keep doing their job. And that's a lesson that I don't think has carried forth. And hopefully it's not a lesson everyone needs.

JS: If you're referring to the FDA internet improvement team conferences and what they're talking about, that's still very much up in the air, as far as I know. Michael Roosevelt and I are both on that.

CS: Yes. I'm very worried about having everything stored in Headquarters. I really am. I mean, it sounds stupid, but I am.

JS: Well, making the appearance of the Web look universal and having everything -- as you said and as others in ORA have conjectured -- everything stored in Headquarters I think are two different things.

CS: Yes.

JS: We'll find out more about that, though.

CS: And I think that even having everything look the same on all the websites, I still go to the Pacific Region website when I need to find something because their website is much better than the one for New Orleans, than the Southeast Region's website, maybe because I used it longer. But I can go there and get to references and do what I need to do, whereas with the Southeast Region, I have to fool around with it more.

JS: But you make a very good point about putting all of your IT eggs in one basket, something I'm sure we'll be talking more about.

CS: I hope so, because if there's a power outage, a snowstorm that puts the Rockville area out for three days, if everything is there, all of the rest of us are going to be sitting on our hands, because we can't live without e-mail. I mean, we just can't. Fax, you know, is like a turtle. If we can't get at it electronically, we're just kind of like dee-dee-dee-dee-dee-dee, because that's where our life is right now. And, you know, you put it all

together in one location at some risk. Even if we're not talking a terrorist attack, we're talking a snowstorm, a fire in a building; it's like, oops, guys, where are the backups? Bring on the backups.

JS: As I said, I think there might be some overreaction here on the part of the information that's come out from ORA to the field about what the plan is. Stay tuned. I know you will.

CS: Yeah.

But other lessons learned, just the value of your employees and trying to take care of them, because without them, we have nothing. And I don't know that they all felt as cared for, but by now they should . . .

Some of them should be feeling cared for because I have. We used to have Consumer Safety Technicians, which is better than a secretary but not quite a secretary, and we have one per supervisor. Due to retirements, we're down to three. All three of them are in the New Orleans area. I have five supervisors. Three of them are here; one of them is in Jackson, Mississippi; and one splits his time between Mandeville and Metairie and New Orleans, David LeRay. All of my CSTs are in New Orleans because two of them had places to go back to immediately, they didn't flood; and one of them just got her house. Janice Llopis just got her house for -- I don't even know if it's done yet, but she's living with family or something. And so, logically, should I have all of my support staff in New Orleans when the staff that needs them is elsewhere? No. But they

have places to live. And I couldn't force them to transfer to Nashville when they have places to live.

Our Compliance Director is in New Orleans. That's not the most efficient location for her, since she works with Ty and myself. She has a house down there. Most of the Compliance Officers are down there.

So we have a sort of, our district is totally different than most districts now, and our individual branches are different because we've tried to accommodate people.

I have an assistant -- what is he called, a Branch Coordinator or something; I don't know what he's called. But he had a house to go back to. He's in New Orleans. I have him handling consumer complaints because he's useless to me, you know, in his current position. So I have him doing something else because he's down there.

So, I mean, we've accommodated as many people as we can. I think Marion ( Ferrante) and Donna Gallien are the only two left here who really don't want to be here, but don't know where they want to be, so they might as well be here because they don't know where they want to be.

JS: I'll be going down to New Orleans in a couple weeks, as I mentioned. What are the staffing levels in both Mandeville and Metairie now?

CS: Mandeville has a regional person, two, three investigators left down there, I think, and David, who supervises both locations. Compliance is down -- there are three Compliance people and the director. And the Recall Coordinator is down there. My assistant is down there. All three of my technicians are down there. I have more support

staff in Mandeville and Metairie, or almost as much support staff, really, as I have Investigators.

JS: What's the staffing level up here for the District Office?

CS: I think there are only 24 of us here. There were 43 of us in New Orleans when we evacuated, or 42, something like that. And a lot of people have gone elsewhere, either transferred to other locations or retired or done what they needed to do to get on with their lives. So we're a lot smaller than we were. But, again, that's how it is.

I don't know if your colleague is going to interview Kip Hanks. Maybe not because Kip is in South Carolina, I think. He's in the Atlanta District, but I think he's in North Carolina or South Carolina. But he chose to go to Atlanta or Atlanta District because he didn't want to stay here.

Carolyn White -- I don't know if you're interviewing Carolyn -- Carolyn is over in Atlanta. She's a supervisor. They evacuated to Atlanta. Her husband got a job there, they bought a house, and she's in Atlanta.

We have some investigators who went to Houston. One supervisor went to Houston; a couple -- a supervisor and an investigator -- went to Dallas. They needed to get on with their lives and they didn't feel that Nashville was going to do it for them, so they left. That's the way it is.

JS: So, the office has spread out a bit.

CS: We're spread out. We're not necessarily as efficient, but we're . . .

JS: But the work is still getting done.

CS: The work is getting done, yeah. We're trying to hire more people so the work will get done better or more efficiently, but till then, we're still making our goals -- not necessarily easily.

JS: We've covered a lot of territory here. Have we left anything out that you want to talk about?

CS: I don't think so. I mean, I don't know what the goal of this whole process is or what becomes of this, but I think it's good that it's being captured, because hopefully no one will ever go through what we went through.

JS: Hopefully we'll learn from what the New Orleans District Office went through, because we don't know what's going to happen.

CS: Yeah. And one would hope that just having that 800 number for people to call if there is a problem was a step in the right direction, because that was definitely something that, who would have thought? It's like tomorrow, if something goes wrong, I'll be

calling my supervisors and telling them to call their staff, hoping it works. But I think that there are lessons to be learned.

But I think the biggest lesson that was learned is that FDA does pull together. I mean, they sent clothes, they sent sweaters and kids' jackets and things, because New Orleans people didn't really have winter coats. And as things got cold last winter, they were sending care packages. Other districts sent things; Seattle sent coffee and various things. I mean, it was just, it was amazing to see what parts of the FDA family did to either build morale or to just try to make people's lives better. I mean, Celeste Corcoran sent me, from Seattle, a bunch of clothes that she had outgrown, and I wore those all that first winter. They were not even me. But that first winter, I wore them because I didn't have any clothes. I've replaced them now, thank you. But, I mean, that kind of outpouring from FDA was amazing.

JS: Well, you know, it's interesting. When we do oral histories with people, which is usually when they're about to retire, they often make the remark that gee, the agency's not the way it used to be; gee, when I started, we did such-and-such. And you could go and talk to someone, and it just doesn't have that feeling of camaraderie anymore. Well, you hear that, but then you also hear the story that I've been hearing over the past couple days, that the agency did pull together and support people that were in serious need.

CS: Yes.

JS: So maybe things haven't changed all that much.

CS: And it wasn't just the agency, it was the individuals. I mean, just, a district would say, "Well, what can we do? Well, we'll make a care package and send it." So, I mean, it was just -- it was an amazing outpouring of concern and care that I don't think any of us expected.

And so we may not be the same agency we were in the '60s or the '70s, or even the '80s, and we have changed a bit, but we still care about our colleagues. And I think that part maybe is what brings people to FDA, the concern for people.

I mean, I tell the story that when I'm giving training, it's that when you finish an inspection, I want you to be able to say, "I'd take that medical device, I'd take that drug, I'd let them implant that stent in my mother." You know, if you can say that when you walk out, or "I'd eat that," if you can say that when you walk out, you've done your job. But it's quite different when we walk out and you go, "Eh, call my parents, tell them don't get that kind of stent," you know, or "Your dad's going in for surgery and be sure to ask what they're going to implant." To say that I'll take that, I'll let my kid eat it, then you've done your job. And I think a lot of us do this job because we care about that. And so they just took that caring and gave it to the people who lost everything.

One of the interesting nuances developed where there were some people who lost everything and some people who lost nothing; mostly the people on the North Shore lost nothing. But when they gave out money or gift certificates or something -- I can't remember what it was -- somebody took up a collection. There was some nonsense about what . . .

TAPE 2, SIDE B

CS: Anyway, there were questions periodically about, well, did so-and-so, who never evacuated and who didn't lose anything, did they deserve the same gift card or whatever? And it's like, well, don't start, you know, splitting the baby. And you're not Solomon. Everybody who was affected should get the same level of whatever, or nothing, because they've been affected. They may not have lost their house and everything that's in it, but they've been affected. So there were people who felt that there were just some people who should get it. But the majority of people were all in it together.

So, I don't know. I like FDA.

JS: Carol, thank you so much for sitting down. I know you've been very busy conducting your own interviews over the last few days, so I really appreciate your taking time to be the subject of one. Thanks.

CS: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW