History

of the

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Interviewee: **Tyler Thornburg**

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

Date: **September 11, 2007**

Place: **New Orleans District Office**
Temporary Relocated to
Nashville, TN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Public Health Service

Food and Drug Administration
Rockville MD 20857

CASSETTE NUMBERS: 1 & 2

GENERAL TOPIC OF INTERVIEW: FDA and the Field Experience with Hurricane Katrina

DATE: 11 September 2007 PLACE| Nashville, TN LENGTH: 100 minutes

INTERVIEWEE:		INTERVIEWER(S):	
NAME:	Tyler Thornburg, District Director	NAME:	John P. Swann, Historian
ADDRESS:	New Orleans District Office Bldg. 200, Suite 500 404 BNA Drive Nashville, TN 37217	ADDRESS:	FDA History Office 5600 Fishers Lane Rockville, MD 20857

FDA SERVICE DATES: FROM: 1972 TO: Present

INDEX

Interview with Tyler Thornburg

District Director, New Orleans District Office

Temporarily Relocated to Nashville

September 11, 2007

TAPE 1, SIDE A

JS: The date is September 11th, 2007. This is an interview with Tyler Thornburg, District Director of the New Orleans District Office, FDA. We are at the New Orleans District Office temporarily relocated to Nashville. My name is John Swann from the FDA History Office, and we're here to talk primarily about the field's response to Hurricane Katrina.

So, Mr. Thornburg, before we start talking about the hurricane and its impact on the agency and the agency's response to this natural disaster, I wonder if you could walk us through, just briefly, how it is you came to the agency and to the New Orleans District Office.

TT: Okay. I graduated college from Northeast Missouri State College in Kirksville, Missouri, in 1972, and at that point in time, FDA was under a hiring initiative they called Project Hire, and I had taken the Federal Service Entrance Exam at the time, while I was in college, and my name ended on a register, and they contacted me and asked me if I'd be interested in coming to work for them in Kansas City. And the summer of '72, August, I began my FDA career in Kansas City, Missouri, at the District Office.

Shortly after beginning my career there, I transferred to the Wichita, Kansas, Resident Post. I was there about four years.

From there, I went to the Benton, Illinois, Resident Post, which was a new office that I opened for Chicago District and established for them. And I spent 17 years in southern Illinois, raising my family. And then when my daughter graduated high school, we decided it was time for us to try something different. So I applied for a job in Seattle, Washington, as a Compliance Officer and was selected, and we packed up and moved to Seattle in 1994.

I was there for a few years and then applied for a job in Dallas, Texas, and in '98 we moved to Dallas, Texas, where I was the Director of Investigations Branch.

And then in April of 2004, I applied for and was selected for the New Orleans District Director's job, and I moved to New Orleans in May of 2004. And in 2005, things all took a change of their own, so . . .

JS: Yes, they did.

Do any cases stand out in your mind from the time you spent in Missouri or Kansas or Illinois or Washington, Dallas? Any things that really had an impact on your career that you were involved in?

TT: Well, in 1972, we were all hired predominantly to do warehouse inspections. At the time, Congress was saying that our food storage supply was in a mess, and they wanted us to go in and clean it up. So, for the most part, I believe there was roughly 400 to 600 employees hired in 1972, and we all cut our teeth doing warehouse, food

warehouse inspections. So I think that was where we got a good sense of FDA rules and regulations and how to collect a sample, document a violation, and write a report, and that's what we did.

I don't know how many warehouse inspections we've done, but there were many instances where there were insect and rodent infestations in those that we photographed, collected samples, and documented, and I've done that clear up through the time in Illinois, when I was a resident there. I was an investigator for 22 years essentially, and always came back to food sanitation.

But we also did quite a bit of work in the bottling industry in my time in Wichita, and I worked for Cincinnati Training Facility periodically, putting on presentations for them. The bottling, food warehouse, and bakeries inspections was their course we used to train for based on our experience. Predominantly, my work was in the food and agricultural commodities for the time I was an investigator.

No case really jumps out more than one or the other. I have some that I remember more than others, but it was all pretty much food work.

JS: So you arrived in New Orleans in 2005.

TT: Four.

JS: Two thousand four, right, right.

These interviews, of course, are seen by people inside of FDA, outside of FDA, and they might not necessarily appreciate how a district office is organized. I wonder if

you could just kind of summarize for the outsider, say something about the size of your staff and how your office is organized, and if that's pretty typical of how an FDA district office is organized.

TT: Okay. The district consists of basically four branches. We have the District Director's Office, and then under that office you have the Administrative Office, the Investigations Branch, and the Compliance Branch, Investigations Branch being the one that has the bulk of the people that go out in the field and do the work, conducting inspections and investigations, collecting samples.

The violations that are encountered by the investigators then are transferred over to the Compliance Branch for review and any regulatory action that they deem appropriate to be taken, and the District Director's Office oversees the operations of all these branches.

The Admin Branch is basically responsible for facilities, personnel, and all the day-in, day-out logistics of running a District Office.

New Orleans, at the time of my arrival, had roughly 42 full-time employees and a couple of stay-in-schools. As part of that, we had the office in New Orleans, and then we had an additional 11 Resident Post offices in the four states that we cover, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Louisiana. We have offices in Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville in Tennessee; Birmingham, Montgomery, and Mobile in Alabama; Jackson, Mississippi; Shreveport, Lafayette, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana. So I think that's 11. And all of those are staffed by smaller groups of people, anywhere from

two to five people, say, with the exception of Nashville, which had about 25 people, say, at the time I came to New Orleans District.

JS: And Nashville, just so we get this on the tape, had at one time been a district office?

TT: Yes. Nashville was a district office at one time, and I believe it was in 1999 that it merged with New Orleans District, and New Orleans became the District Office and Nashville became a Branch, which still had its own Branch Director, per se, that handled the investigations and compliance actions for Nashville at the time, which, they covered predominantly the state of Tennessee and northern Alabama in their travel area.

JS: Okay. So the coverage of New Orleans remained, basically taking over what Nashville had at the time. Is that right?

TT: Well, I think that there was a little restructuring of Nashville, too, and some of it may have gone to Atlanta, and some of it may have gone to Cincinnati, like Kentucky went to Cincinnati and to one of the Carolinas or something, or went to Georgia. I don't remember what the exact structure was when the transfer took place.

But at the time I came into New Orleans with those offices in Nashville, there were roughly 100 people that came under my direct supervision within those four states.

JS: Prior to August of 2005, had the New Orleans District Office encountered any significant natural disasters?

TT: Well, they've always had the potential for tropical storms and hurricanes in the area, and having not spent much time there before the storm, I don't have all the history for that. But I know that Betsy was a big storm that affected some of the employees in the early years, maybe even before they were employed by the agency. And I think Camille was another storm that hit. So they have had hurricanes, but they have not suffered the catastrophic impact that was brought upon them through Katrina.

JS: But since the time that you became District Director, there was no other really significant storm.

TT: The closest one was Ivan, which occurred in 2004, about September of 2004, which was predicted to come straight to New Orleans, but at the last minute veered and went into the Gulf, more the Florida Panhandle, and we kind of got a pass on that. But at one time it looked like it was going to hit New Orleans, which was a real eye-opener for me.

Having grown up in the Midwest, hurricanes were something that you read about or saw on TV, and I had always been led to believe that you just stayed indoors and had a party. But having had my own personal effects and life disrupted by it, I found that's not exactly the same.

JS: Those of us who grew up in the Midwest probably were more accustomed to tornadoes and the havoc they create as opposed to hurricanes.

TT: True. But the difference being they're a much smaller storm and you don't get to watch them on television for a week before they hit.

JS: That's right. There's the drama of the approaching storm that you don't have with a tornado or a cell that generates tornadoes.

TT: The anticipation is the worst in many cases.

JS: Well, Ivan was a near-miss. And I guess that leads to the next question, which is what kind of procedures did we have in place to deal with major natural disasters? We probably had some kind of policies and procedures written down, did we not?

TT: We did. We had an emergency office closure procedure that we had activated on a couple of occasions, because when a storm is predicted in the Gulf and you don't really know where it's going to go, a lot of people, just for their own safety and sanity, evacuate just to get themselves and their family out of harm's way in the event it does come. And that had happened on many occasions before my tenure in New Orleans and even during my short tenure in New Orleans, Louisiana, where people would evacuate, and it was usually a three-day trip to the relatives or some other part unknown, and then the storm

passes and you come back and resume your life. And that was accepted because we didn't want anyone to put themselves in harm's way. And our policy was liberal leave, make sure that people know where you are and how to get in touch with you, and that you are evacuating, and take equipment that you could to keep in touch with the agency if you needed to.

JS: Now, I guess we'll fast-forward here to August of 2005. Hurricane Katrina had actually made landfall before it came to Louisiana. It went through Florida. Is that true?

TT: Correct, yes.

JS: Can you say anything about that? I mean, that's probably more in the purview of the Florida District Office. But it did do some damage in Florida, did it not?

TT: It did. It came across from the Atlantic, as I recall, went across the southern tip of Florida, and then when it reemerged into the Gulf and became a hurricane again, it was anticipated that it would gather a little strength and veer due north and go up the Florida coast and come in on the Panhandle area of Florida, which was not unusual given that I think Florida had already been hit by five hurricanes that year anyway. Between the previous year and that year, there were several hurricanes that either directly hit or skirted Florida, and they had suffered some major damage. Like when Ivan hit the previous year, it destroyed the Panhandle area and wiped out a bridge or two and a lot of the beach

communities that were along the Gulf there. So at first glance, it would appear that, okay, we've dodged another one, but that's not what happened. It did not veer north.

JS: No. As a matter of fact, it strengthened once it got into the warm Gulf waters, and it became -- I don't know if it reached Category 5 class, but it certainly was a Category 4 hurricane with, what, wind speeds of . . .

TT: Hundred forty-five miles an hour or something like that.

JS: Yes. And the hurricane-force winds extended probably 100 miles out from the center, I suspect.

TT: I think the diameter of the storm when it made landfall was roughly 350 miles wide. It's an unbelievable thing to see on radar when you're sitting there and it's coming in your direction.

It may have made Category 5 over the Gulf, but I don't think it was a Category 5 when it hit.

JS: Well, it made landfall on the 29th. And was it right between Mississippi and Louisiana?

TT: Basically, the eye of the storm, as I have been able to determine, came across at Slidell, Louisiana, which is where I lived at the time. And the way the storm rotates

counterclockwise for a hurricane -- I learned a lot about hurricanes in my short tenure in New Orleans District -- the strongest winds come on the right side of the storm. I guess if you were in the storm and facing north, it would be on the right side. That's where the strongest winds are because they're building strength coming off the warm Gulf water and rotate around. So in that regard, Slidell and the New Orleans area didn't get hit with the strongest winds. They went into the Mississippi, Florida, Alabama area.

JS: By the way, where is Slidell in relation to New Orleans?

TT: Slidell is about, probably 35 miles east of New Orleans, across Lake Pontchartrain towards Mississippi. It sits about five or six miles from the Mississippi border.

JS: So that's where your home was.

TT: My home was in Slidell, yes.

JS: Now, at what point did the emergency plan kick in for the New Orleans District Office?

TT: Well, since Katrina arrived on the weekend, that put a different perspective on things, because as of Thursday and Friday of the week before, there was no indication that the storm was going to bother or come to the New Orleans area. It was a Florida

issue and headed into the Florida Gulf. So when we left the office on Friday, we didn't really anticipate that there was an issue with the storm.

But as it continued to gain strength over Friday evening and then Saturday, then that's when it became a little more evident that we were going to experience some sort of storm out of the system.

So I had not planned to evacuate the area. My wife was working as a nurse at the hospital there, and she'd worked on Saturday, and I spent the day boarding windows and trying to gather up stuff to weather through the storm and worked pretty much a 10-hour day around the house, waiting for her to get home. She worked a 12-hour shift. And then we sat down and said, "Okay, we're just going to see what it looks like tomorrow and see what we need to do to batten down the hatches." So we really hadn't made any contact with the staff or anything at that point in time because they were doing their own thing as far as evacuating to their normal evacuation points, friends, family, and routine places that they stayed.

JS: But the staff understood that this was what they were supposed to do. They were supposed to follow the evacuation procedures that everyone else in the area follows.

TT: They're encouraged to do that; that's what they're supposed to do. Some of them may have left before then. Some of them have never left. They didn't feel like it was necessary, that storms had passed before. And the request by the political leaders in the area was that you evacuate, because I do recall getting a recorded message the night before -- I guess it was Saturday night -- saying, "We strongly recommend you

evacuate." And then they had implemented the evacuation plan for the area, which is Contraflow traffic and things of that so that people could get out and it could handle the traffic.

So at that point in time, we had not made any contact with all the staff to say, "This is what we're going to do," because we really didn't know at that point what the situation was until Saturday. But that all changed on Sunday morning.

JS: Yes. So, what did you do?

TT: Well, I had a fitful night on Saturday, and I got up early Sunday morning and turned on the television and saw this huge red storm sitting off the Gulf right outside of New Orleans and Slidell, and I went in and told my wife, "We need to get out of here." So we packed up in about two hours or less and headed north, not really knowing where we were going, didn't really take a lot of stuff with us, you know; anticipating I might be stopping by an office if things got bad, I took some work clothes with me. But for the most part, we, you know, when you leave your home, you can't take everything, so we didn't take much of anything other than the clothes on our back and the dog.

JS: And, by the way, at the time that the office closed before the weekend, before anyone knew what was happening, there was no idea, of course, to sort of batten down the hatches at the office because no one, of course, had any idea of what was about to happen.

TT: That's correct. And a lot of people didn't bring a laptop computer home with them. They didn't have cell phones. Some people didn't even have their travel cards or their FDA identification with them. Being a manager, I always have my cell phone and a Blackberry to communicate with, and I had given some thought to going back to the office and trying to get some other equipment, but I would have been going against traffic and didn't know how long it would take, so I opted not to go back into the office. I knew that our IT person had gone in and had taken tapes, backup tapes, for our system with him on Friday when we left the building, just in case. So he either got them on Friday or he went back in. I'm pretty sure he got them on Friday. I was going to say Saturday, but he usually evacuated fairly early, than most people anyway, so . . .

JS: This might be a good time just to say a little bit about the facility, the District Office facility, where it is in the city, how it's laid out, how many floors, kind of where things are, especially where sensitive things are.

TT: Sure. Our office was located in what they called New Orleans East, which was about, probably about 10 to 13 miles east of the downtown New Orleans area. It sat between Lake Pontchartrain and downtown on the east side. It was in kind of a business complex adjacent to a mall, shopping mall. It was in a private building. I believe it was six stories tall, and we had our own parking lot garage there just off of the interstate, I-10. So it wasn't a government facility.

And we were on the fourth floor. We occupied the entire fourth floor of space in that building, and then I had a suite, where the admin office was, on the fifth floor in that building. There were commercial offices below and above us then.

JS: So you had some elevation there in the building, above ground level.

TT: Yes.

JS: Okay. But your parking structure was sort of right . . .

TT: It was just the ground level and then one level above parking-type garage, so that was it, and then a ground lot.

JS: Okay. So your IT person had gone in at some point before all hell broke loose and got the backup tapes off your computer.

TT: Correct.

JS: You had gone north, as I imagine many people on the staff had. Was there a plan in place? You had contact information for the people, at least home phone numbers or something?

TT: Well, yes, we did. We always have an employee roster that I always kept in my

briefcase and took with me every evening when I left the office, and I'd just maintain it and probably even kept an extra copy at home in the event of an emergency.

We've planned these things. We've had drills in these types of operations, and we've experimented with it, but never anticipating that we would have to implement or to use it.

We didn't leave Slidell until probably about a little before 10:30 on Sunday morning.

JS: The date?

TT: Of the 29th.

JS: Twenty-ninth. Okay.

TT: Actually the 28th. I'm sorry. That was Sunday.

JS: And also, people who haven't been through hurricanes probably have to understand this very interesting time frame in which a person has to make a decision when to evacuate, because if you don't evacuate by a certain time, then it's just going to be impossible to do that. And sometimes you have to make a decision when you really don't know what's going to happen.

TT: That's correct. And a lot of people, when they have a storm approaching, they

make a hotel or a motel reservation 100, 150 miles out in anticipation that they're going to evacuate and use it, and then if they don't, they cancel it if the storm changes direction. So a lot of people know where they're going because they've got their reservation.

But if you wait too long and there's a mass evacuation, then it's gridlock, and you go nowhere, and then you're sitting in your car just trying to get out of town.

So when we left, it wasn't quite that bad yet. It was starting to pick up. The traffic was moving, and it was where the Contraflow lanes merged back into the two lanes, two going north and two going south, that we hit a little snag, and it took us probably an hour to get rolling again. But for all intents and purposes, it only cost us an extra hour of time to get out of town when we left.

Plus we were 35 miles east of downtown New Orleans as well at that time, so we had a little jump on the traffic from downtown. But it was obvious we needed to go north through Mississippi rather than trying to go back and go over towards Texas because it would be running into that traffic.

When we left, we really didn't know where we were going, to be quite honest with you. We just knew we were leaving. And we had thought we might go to my daughter's, who lived in North Carolina at the time, but given the time that we left, we knew we couldn't drive there in one day. It would be an extremely long day.

But a coworker and friend from Nashville had called me on my cell phone and said, "If you don't have anyplace to go, don't worry about it. Just come up here and stay with me or stay with us in Nashville," so we basically said, "We're on our way, and that's what we're going to do," because I knew if the storm was the magnitude it was going to be, that I would have to go into the office the next day and try to regroup, and Nashville

was our devolving office under our COOP plan, our Continuity of Operation Plan, so it just made sense we would head to Nashville, and that was how we made that decision, basically, on the road.

JS: Normally, how long a drive is it from New Orleans to Nashville?

TT: Eight hours.

JS: But in a normal circumstance.

TT: A normal circumstance. And I think it took us, oh, 10, maybe 11 to get here that day, leaving when we did. I think we finally got into Nashville around 8:30, 9:00 that night.

JS: Okay. So on the night of the 28th, you're situated in Nashville.

TT: Correct.

JS: And have you heard anything from your staff by that time, or anything from the Regional Office or the District Office?

TT: I had talked to Headquarters. The Emergency Operations people had called me as I was driving out of town, letting me know that they were setting up their emergency 24/7

procedures, and were going to look at it, from their perspective, as a national emergency that could occur. They knew something was going to happen; they just didn't know where it was going to happen at that point.

And I had spoken with the Director of Investigations, Carol Sanchez, and encouraged her to also come to Nashville. She didn't really know where she was going. I encouraged her to leave town, and I said, "Just come to Nashville because that's where we're going to end up anyway if it's as bad as it looks." And she had started to evacuate, but she was probably four hours behind me in the big scheme of things because she lived closer to downtown.

And I don't recall who else I may have spoken to staff-wise, but I'm sure I probably talked to a couple of people.

But for the most part, the day was spent just trying to get to Nashville and regroup from there, so there wasn't a lot of time spent trying to call the staff and find out where they were because you knew they were making their own arrangements, we hoped anyway.

JS: Well, I think, clearly personal safety trumps all else at a time like this.

TT: Correct. And it was Sunday, so that was a whole other complication that was created by the storm. They were not in a work mode, per se, as it was on the weekend.

JS: So you're in Nashville at the time the hurricane makes landfall on the 29th. I can't

remember whether it's morning or evening that it makes landfall. But that's a Sunday or Monday?

TT: Monday.

JS: It's a Monday.

TT: I got up and came to work with a coworker, because to sit around and watch it on TV just further exacerbates the situation and doesn't solve anything, so we decided to come in and see what the reports were, and I had an office to work from, so it just kind of helped to pass the time.

JS: You have an office to work in, but you don't even know if you have a house anymore.

TT: That's correct.

JS: That's got to be a tough feeling, to come in to work and not know what's going to happen.

TT: It was nice to be able to come to the office, though, and not have to concentrate or dwell on that. So it gave us something else to work on.

TAPE 1, SIDE B

JS: Right. So it's the 29th. You're in the Nashville Branch at the time. I guess it's not formally designated as the New Orleans District Office relocated to Nashville yet, but that will be soon in coming.

At what point, either that day or the next day, do you or your staff start trying to account for everyone? Because you have a staff of about four dozen or so, is that right?

TT: Forty-five counting the stay-in-school employees that we had. We had 42 full-time employees and three stay-in-school employees that worked for us out of our New Orleans office.

So basically immediately we started trying to locate people just to make sure we knew where they were and that they were okay and didn't need some sort of assistance.

All of this was hampered by the fact that once the storm hit, the telephone service for New Orleans basically went down, including cell service. Our cell phones that had New Orleans numbers would work in Nashville if you were calling a number outside of the New Orleans area, as would anybody's phone. But if you tried to call in to New Orleans, more than likely you would get a "cannot be connected." So that stymied us on trying to find out those people that we thought may have stayed in the area. So each day we gradually contacted a few more, but I think it was September 7th before we actually had confirmed we had found every employee and they were safe, which was very labor-intensive and mentally exhausting on a daily basis, trying to keep track of these people.

JS: Not knowing where your staff might be, or even if they're alive, that's got to be just a tremendous drain.

TT: Oh, yeah. And the stories here of some people who did not evacuate, and yet you did not know how to get a hold of them or didn't know what their situation was. So those were the ones that took the longest to really track down, and it was always nice to be able to scratch another one off the list as having been found.

And they moved or evacuated to Texas, Missouri, Iowa, Georgia, I think the Carolinas, some went to Florida. I mean, the staff was scattered over a tremendous geographical area. And I think a lot of them were in a form of shock and didn't really know who to call or where to call and didn't think about it. It's human nature. You don't evacuate with your COOP plan or your call-down list at the time. Those are not things that are high on your list. It's to save yourself and get out of harm's way.

JS: Of course.

TT: So, many of them didn't have a phone number or didn't remember the Nashville phone number, didn't know how to get a hold of anybody there, didn't have a phone that worked.

So it was -- we started learning lessons very quickly after the storm hit: what was needed, what you could and couldn't do.

But our staff devoted most of the time to establishing contact with those that evacuated that were stationed in the New Orleans office. And not only that, we had ancillary offices, Baton Rouge, Mobile, Alabama, that were also affected, and some people evacuated from those offices too.

JS: I gather your staff starts trickling into the Nashville office. You mentioned Carol Sanchez, your Director of Investigations Branch. Did she come up to Nashville?

TT: She made it in on that Monday. She did not make it all the way to Nashville on the Sunday that she evacuated. She made it to Birmingham, I think, and spent the night, and then came on in the next day. So she showed up probably on Tuesday, I guess. So I was pretty much a one-man show on Monday as far as representing the District.

But there were questions, as you could imagine, from Headquarters and everybody wanting to know what the status was, and they all had questions that couldn't be answered. The phones were ringing constantly, and people were in and out of the office. It was just kind of chaos.

JS: Was it your feeling that the folks that you were hearing from, particularly from Headquarters, do you think they really understood and appreciated what was happening down here, I mean, in your eyes?

TT: Well, I think there are two things here that you have to look at, one being the personal perspective and one being the professional perspective. And they're all looking

at it from the professional perspective as to what kind of damage are we experiencing, and what do we need to do, and how do we gear up to resolve those issues once we can reenter the area, and that's understandable.

But what they probably didn't have a handle on was the magnitude of the people that were impacted personally and what they were going through, and what we were trying to do just to try to find them, to make sure that we had everyone accounted for. That question was asked, and it was part of our daily reports. What do you know about the staff? How many have you found? Is everybody okay? And we couldn't answer that for several days because we didn't know where they all were. So that was part of the daily update pretty much predominantly for me. That was my goal, was to try to track everybody down, and then we could move on to the next phase.

But once we had everyone tracked down and those that we could contact, the decision was made relatively early on that we should just bring them to Nashville, have them congregate here so that we could regroup. That way we wouldn't have to worry about trying to communicate with them haphazardly, because we didn't know whether we could always get a hold of them. So when we found someone and we could talk to them, we would say, "We need you to report to Nashville. Don't worry about it. Just get here as soon as you can and keep us posted."

JS: I think the reports, the Situation Reports, mention that the employees were told that, if they could get to Nashville by the 7th, to try and do that, that lodging would be provided for them. I'm anxious to hear how Nashville was, because you have, you know, within a week or so, maybe about two to three dozen employees from New Orleans who

are now in the Nashville office, right? So people are making do, right? They're sharing offices, they're . . .

|

TT: Well, we had a conference room in Nashville and some extra space, but the interesting thing about it was that there was vacant space adjacent to our building that we were occupying at the time we were able to get an emergency lease and we could expand into that and establish offices for the people, which didn't happen immediately. But, I mean, within less than two weeks, I think we had the office up and running to accommodate these people with a desk, a computer, and phone system.

JS: Things normally don't work that fast in the government.

TT: They do not. And to be able to get these people access to a computer where they could communicate with family, friends, work, and also keep track of what was going on in their home community by Internet news was very important.

But reality is, of the people that reported to Nashville that were affected by the storm, we got virtually no work out of them either. They were at work, but they were not *at work*, if you know what I mean.

JS: That can't be a huge surprise.

TT: No. I mean, I don't think anybody was surprised by that, and no one was faulted

for it, because each person processes their circumstances in a different way. It's human nature, you know.

JS: And this might be a good time to talk about those personal circumstances, because I do want to talk about that. When the Regional Emergency Center gets involved here, you start getting a handle on the impact of the storm on our regulated industry. But when the staff is gathering here maybe a week, a little over a week after the storm, does anyone have an idea of what they've left behind?

TT: They were hoping, because as the storm hit, they realized that New Orleans *per se* was not damaged by wind as much. It was the breaching of the levees and the flooding that caused all of the catastrophic damage down there for the most part. At one point everyone was feeling fairly good about what had happened because they realized the bulk of the storm had hit in Mississippi and Alabama -- not good for them, but from the standpoint of New Orleans proper not having been damaged too much then, they felt pretty good. And then, when the levees started breaching and the water started rising, that's when reality set in to these people, because they could get video or communications to show, and they knew their home was definitely sitting right in the middle of that. And the bottom line was that out of the 42 people, full-time employees that evacuated and were impacted by that office, there was probably 22 to 23 of them that either lost their home or had severe structural damage to their home as a result of the flooding.

JS: What about your home?

TT: I was one of the very fortunate ones, all things considered. My home had minimal damage, a few shingles, no broken windows, no holes in the roof, some peripheral damage to the fencing, and I lost a lot of trees, but the trees all fell in the yard or between the houses, and we were able to . . . Of course, the power went off for virtually two weeks, and everything in there was rotted, and it was just a big mess, but not as much a mess as some people faced when they returned to their homes for the first time.

It took me two weeks to get back to actually see.

JS: Had your wife gone back first?

TT: No. No one had gone back.

I had some people drive by -- some of the people stayed in the area and ventured out, and we could communicate with. They did go by my home and told me that it appeared to be okay, but you didn't know whether the security had been breached and whether somebody was living in your house that didn't belong there, or whether they had helped themselves to whatever was in your house, because virtually 99.9 percent of my possessions were still right there in Slidell, in the house. We took less than 1 percent of what we owned with us.

So, that said, I tried to get back the first week, but you had the fuel and the road issues, and we just aborted that mission when we couldn't be assured that we could get out if we got back down there. So we waited and went the following week. I had some friends and family that supported me and came with me, and we spent two solid days cleaning up. And by then, the power had been restored to my area and we felt somewhat relieved.

But you're dealing with your personal stresses and tension on top of everything else, so it was a very fast-paced time in my life at that point, for those several days.

JS: Your wife was at a hospital, working at a hospital in New Orleans.

TT: Slidell.

JS: How did this work out for her?

TT: Well, if she had been working on the Sunday that the storm hit, she would have been sequestered in the hospital. But she had worked the Saturday night before, and so she wasn't scheduled to work on Sunday, so she evacuated. But they wanted everybody to come in, naturally, but you couldn't communicate with the hospital. By then, we were in Nashville; you make your own personal choices. And she finally was able to get a hold of them, and she said, "I'm not coming back anytime soon." They understand that. There's just so many people, so many had evacuated, that was true of the entire area.

JS: The Employee Assistance Program had set up shop here in Nashville and offered not only the counseling support, but they offered to help the staff find lodging and so on. And I'm sure that must have been a help to them, to your staff. But what was your observation? How was your staff reacting to this disaster?

TT: Well, those that knew they had lost their home and all their possessions or had severe damage, each one of them processed that information a little differently. There were some that were just kind of in a daze for the most part, and lots of emotions on a daily basis in the office. Very difficult for people to accept their lot in life at that point in time, and knowing how to proceed or how to move on and what the next step was going to be for them. In that regard, I'd say the agency did an outstanding job in giving them support and per diem and shelter and not having to worry about where they were going to stay or how they were going to be able to afford it for the long haul.

And the outpouring of the FDA family, as we call it, across the country, wanting to help and sending clothes and supplies and different things, toys for kids, and all that kind of stuff was tremendous. I mean, we were continually getting requests: What can we do? What can we send you? And people sent any and everything. But things would just show up, and we would try to give it to the people that needed it the most. So there was a very strong concern and a compassion for the people that were affected. And, you know, daily e-mails: How is everybody? What can we do? You spend time dealing with that.

From my perspective, that was my full-time job, dealing with the personal lives of the staff at the time, and not so much trying to get reestablished as an agency within the city, because the region, Southeast Region in Atlanta had taken on that task. You know, we wanted to put people down there that weren't mentally taxed by the situation, they didn't suffer personal losses. And it was not right to send people down there whose home had been destroyed and ask them to go out and work doing inspections or investigations, because you know that their heart and soul is going to be into trying to salvage what's in their home.

So we deployed people to do the work from other parts of the country and kind of let our staff get their lives back together.

JS: You mentioned many staff lost their homes. Did anyone actually lose people in their family?

TT: To my knowledge, no one lost an immediate family member as a direct cause of the storm. But there were many, many illnesses and, actually, subsequent deaths on the part of some families I think due to storm-related stress or conditions that . . .

JS: So this happened to some family members?

TT: Yes, yes. There were lots of family members lost by many employees that work for us, not as a direct result of the storm, but I think indirectly. And I think as you talk to

some of those people that we've identified, you will hear those kind of stories come out, too.

JS: I certainly will be talking to other staff here in Nashville and in New Orleans.

Now, there's obviously a great deal of confusion here. I mean, one plans as much as one can for emergencies of all kinds, but actually implementing, you know, dealing with what we call the everyday work of the agency is a challenge at this time. But at some point, I mean, you have to come to grips with dealing with the impact of the storm on food, the safety of food, the availability of drugs, of medical devices, and so on. And you mentioned that the Southeast Regional Office was very actively involved in that. Could you say a little bit more about that and what their role was?

TT: As part of the response plan, first we had the emergency evacuation plan which we followed, for all intents and purposes. A lot of this, you make it up as you go. There's no textbook that you can refer to and say, "If this happens, you do this. Or if 20 percent of your staff lost their home, you have to do this." It doesn't exist. It's nice if it did, but you just can't do that, and there's no way to write that down. And we have plenty of manuals and guidance documents in FDA.

JS: Yes. We never had a shortage of these.

TT: But unfortunately, they don't really help you in dealing with the nuances of a situation like this. I mean, you just need -- to me, you need a skeletal framework, this is

what you need to do, and then you've kind of got to make it up as you go after that, because each time it's going to be a little different situation.

This was, to my knowledge, the first time there'd been any national catastrophic event that had so affected a District Office or any FDA office of this magnitude in the history of the agency. It's the first time we lost an office, and that's another story that we haven't gotten to yet, is the office in New Orleans.

So we had the Emergency Response Plan, which we followed. Then we basically implemented the COOP plan. And then, as a result from that, we have what we call the Incident Command System, which is the Forestry/USDA procedures that were established in California basically in dealing with forest fires, to have an Incident Command Center where you'd have an incident commander that is basically in charge of the entire operations for a catastrophic event, and that's the procedure that we evolved to as we progressed into this thing. And that's where the Regional Office came in. They became the Incident Command Center for the New Orleans disaster.

JS: When does that happen? A week after it?

TT: I would expect that it took two to three weeks in the process. In many instances and, I think, lessons learned, we would set that up immediately, within the first week after a disaster, if it happened now, because logistically you need some sort of structure as to who's in charge of what and who to go to. And as you can probably tell from the reports you've seen, there are lots of people that are copied on the Situation Reports, and if you look at that, each one of them then might have a question about something that's in

the report and copies everybody else, and there were thousands of e-mails back and forth with questions that we really didn't have the answers to or the time to even answer in many instances.

JS: Who was the Incident Commander?

TT: Malcolm Frazier was identified as the Incident Commander, and he was the Deputy Regional Food and Drug Director for Southeast Region, Atlanta.

JS: Now, you mentioned staff was sent back into New Orleans.

TT: True.

JS: These were staff that maybe were of a mind, shall we say, that that could be there and be on the job and be able to focus, for whatever reasons. Maybe they weren't as seriously affected or maybe they were, but whatever, they were there. Where were they, because there was no longer a District Office, was there?

TT: No, there wasn't.

One of the saving graces, I guess, is our Baton Rouge office was not damaged, so we had an office there we could use, albeit small. It's only like a three-person office. So we could congregate there and we could regroup there and use the phone and some computers and stuff once we got them operational again.

We had the OCI office in Covington, Louisiana, which was just north of New Orleans, and that office was not damaged. In fact, some people weathered the storm in that office, you know, as a place of refuge while the storm was going on. And, as a result, they had extra space, and so they offered up their office as a temporary headquarters for us to work from, and we had access to phones and computers and work equipment and stuff. So that's kind of how it started.

Then the state -- in Baton Rouge, their state office headquarters, the capital, they set up the Incident Command Center there for the entire state, and disaster relief. And I think they took over an old abandoned shopping mall, essentially, and converted that into an Incident Command Center where all of the federal and state agencies came together and established a networking group, and it was just a big, wide-open mall that they had partitioned off for various and sundry, you know, the FEMA and Corps of Engineers and FDA and USDA and EPA, and all of them had offices and people stationed there. That way, you could kind of get up and walk around and talk to those people if you had an incident or an issue that you thought needed to be addressed by them.

But all this took time to come together, so . . . But we worked closely with the state because the state, they had the burden of trying to determine what the situation was with respect to the food and water supply for the people that were left there still trying to survive.

And they also lost their employees. They evacuated to parts unknown, couldn't get back, had their own damage to deal with, so their staff was severely restricted. But yet they didn't have any regional office to call on or someplace else. They had to get

right back into the groove and do the best they could do. So they called for FDA assistance almost immediately.

There were some tense situations, as you can imagine in any crisis situation, and people feeling that other groups or individuals weren't as responsive as they should be or as quickly as they should be. Anybody that watched the news or read the paper during this whole time knew the people in New Orleans didn't feel like the government was responding, and I think in some ways the bureaucracy probably got in the way of the recovery efforts down there.

JS: Well, certainly, in looking through the Situation Reports, you see reminders almost every few days that there are 30,000 people holed up in the Superdome, including almost a thousand special-needs patients, and the conditions are deteriorating, the Superdome has suffered hurricane damage. And as you read through, you think, "Well, when are they going . . . I mean, they're planning to evacuate 2,500 a day, but when are they going to start doing this?" Of course, there are logistic issues here. But they were talking about the Department of Defense being in charge of this. If anybody can deal with tough logistical issues, you would think they could. So frustration is easy to understand when you're standing on a rooftop trying to survive a flood or you see dead bodies around a mass of people.

TT: Sure.

JS: It's understandable.

But, in any case, the agency is working closely with the state, certainly the State of Louisiana, and I'm sure the states of Mississippi and Alabama as well in dealing with the storm.

TT: Well, it even goes further than that because Texas and Oklahoma and Arkansas and Kentucky and all different states offer their services and expertise to come in. So, I mean, there is a response plan that not only is just federal, but it also involves states.

JS: It's even international, isn't it, because you're getting donations from Canada of medical devices, maybe low-risk medical devices, and donations of food and so on from other countries.

TT: Correct.

JS: Of course, we have to make sure that these are safe and so on. But all these things are coming in at one time, and it is a major concern for the agency.

TT: It's quite an undertaking to manage that. You just can't do that; one person just really can't do that, or one organization.

JS: Right.

So, as the days unfold your District Office is finally in a state where you can go out and start inspecting farmlands and industry in the states. I noticed there was one

report of -- I don't know if this was unusual or not -- but there was one report of a shipment of shrimp, a pretty significant shipment of shrimp from, I think, Alabama to Florida. It was like 120,000 pounds of shrimp, some of which, in this shipment, had been submerged in the floodwaters. Is that something we seized or destroyed? What happened with that?

TT: I'm not really sure I recall the exact shipment you're talking about, but that's just one example of many things.

JS: But my point is, this was not necessarily an unusual circumstance.

TT: No, definitely not.

JS: Lots of things like this happened.

TT: I know there were chicken pieces that got washed out into the Gulf, and somebody wanted to know if they should be salvaged. And USDA, who regulates red meats and poultry, says, "If it's in the Gulf, it belongs to the alligators right now." So that's our way of taking care of it.

There was shrimp, sugar, coffee, all of these things that were affected by the floodwaters, or not just floodwaters, but the storm waters. The roofs were damaged, the rain poured in. It soaked the food products. If you've ever been in New Orleans, you know the humidity, the temperatures are extreme, especially without air conditioning.

TAPE 2, SIDE A

TT: If no power, no generators, you've got floodwaters or rainwater-soaked packages, parcels, bags. Mold starts to grow immediately, things start to rot, and there's just thousands and thousands of pounds of food products that are no longer salvageable and have to be destroyed.

JS: I've had to read this two or three times to make sure that I wasn't mistaken, but one of the Situation Reports said there were something like a hundred barges of grain that had to be destroyed around New Orleans. I mean, that's incredible.

TT: They could have sunk, they could have had their tops come off and get soaked with water. There were lots of things that -- the damage was unbelievable, what was done not only by the storm, but then what was done post-storm by the looters and flooding and just the failure of power systems to come back on, and the refrigerated and frozen products that were okay but perished because they couldn't be cooled or kept refrigerated.

JS: So getting something like blood supplies to people, even though we might have supplies of blood, there's maybe no way to navigate the transportation infrastructure to get things like this to those in need.

TT: Since we had to build a mobile hospital because most of the hospitals went down as a result of the storm. They lost power, had damage, could not reopen. So we had to set up temporary hospitals, things of that nature, so . . .

JS: Well, the agency, I think, has to oversee any destruction of regulated commodities. Is that right? So with all of these things you're talking about, we have to be there to see it actually destroyed, right?

TT: We do, or the state. We worked very closely with the state, and we shared a lot of that responsibility. And in many instances we would go by a place, and they developed what was called a placard system, which, if they couldn't find anybody there and they could tell that this facility had damage, they would put a sign on there, "You cannot reopen this establishment until you contact the state and it's been inspected." And we worked very closely with them in that.

But just the logistics of getting in and around the area with all the debris and the downed trees and the high water, you couldn't get to certain areas. It took weeks to get to some of these areas to even see what kind of damage it was. And then those people that thought they were going to lose products, they were firing up their barbeque grills and cooking for the rescue people, and none of this came under the right controls or sanitation, and the last thing you wanted was a foodborne-illness outbreak or an epidemic to get started because of underprocessing or improper handling of food products. So each good Samaritan action sometimes had to be evaluated from a health standpoint.

JS: I assume this was a foodborne issue, but I remember reading about several vibrios cases in, was it Mississippi, and several deaths.

TT: *Vibrio vulnificus* is very common with raw oysters, and because of the way that the system is, when it floods New Orleans, when the water recedes, it also floods the sewage system, and that takes that sewage back out to sea or back into Lake Pontchartrain. And at one time I believe they did have to pump sewage into Lake Pontchartrain just to help relieve the water from within the city, which is not uncommon, I guess, in times of flooding to that area.

The magnitude of the problems and possible problems and issues that had to be dealt with, we don't have enough time to address them in this interview, basically. And it took a tremendous effort on the part of many federal agencies and state agencies and other organizations to try to get things back up and running. And New Orleans, for a lot of parts, is not there yet. There are still desolate, deserted areas and abandoned areas and dilapidated homes and no homes. It's not anything like it was before the storm, and it's not going to be for many years.

JS: We have now two sites around New Orleans where we have FDA offices. Can you say something about those, when those came about and what the staffing level is there, and what they're overseeing?

TT: The natural phenomenon was if your home was not damaged and was livable, you

wanted to move back down there and not live in Nashville, Tennessee, if you didn't have to, because that (New Orleans) was your home. So we were able, in working with GSA, to find temporary office space that was available. It wasn't ideal necessarily, wasn't perfectly designed for our needs, but we would look at it and say, "We can make this work." So we were able to establish offices in Mandeville, which is on the north side of Lake Pontchartrain, and in Metairie, which is just across Lake Pontchartrain into New Orleans. It's probably about 10, five to 10 miles from downtown. And so between those two offices, right now we have about 23 people that are back down there living and working in the area.

JS: Were you able to recover much of anything from the District Office facility?

TT: Well, to speak to that briefly, once we finally -- it was October before I was able to get back into that office and really do an assessment of what our conditions were, and I was the first one to go back into the office after the hurricane and really see what we were up against. We kept saying we can't get there, you can't get in, and so I took it upon myself that I want to know what it's like and what we've got before we make a decision on how we move forward. So I worked through the building owner and everybody and made contacts and set up an appointment to get down there and get into that building, and I did that. I believe it was in October, which is, what, two months after the storm hit.

And our building we knew had been flooded on the ground floor and the parking garage, and all of our government cars were virtually worthless at that point because the windows were broken out of them and they were wet.

So when I got back into the building, amazingly, inside it was fairly dry. There were certain portions where there had been roof leaks or windows broken that allowed the water to get in, and there was a few spaces where that water had started to mold things, and it was very humid, very hot in there, because there was no power, no lights, no air. But for the most part, it looked like at the time there was a lot that could be salvaged.

But as this proceeded, it was like clear up into November, December, before we could even find anybody that was willing to help us haul it out of there. We had no elevator. We had to haul things up and down the stairs, which is a back flight of stairs, a metal stair, and that was from the fourth and fifth floor. Ultimately, we got a crane hired to come in there, and we took out a window and we could crane stuff down to the parking lot. And I think they finally got lights restored to where we could have lights.

But we didn't get a lot. We got all of our original factory files out of the building, which I think are salvaged, so we have those now in Nashville. We're trying to establish a file room here with all of our original files.

JS: Now, these were paper files. These weren't anything on computer tapes, right?

TT: Predominantly paper files, and we do have some on disks as part of a process we've been experimenting with. But for the most part it was several hundred boxes of paper files.

JS: And the condition of the paper was okay?

TT: It was for the most part. I think of maybe 2,000 or 3,000 files, we probably had less than four that we would have to say were water damaged and couldn't be salvaged. So we were very lucky in that because our file room was located in the middle of the building, which was not affected by exterior windows and things of that nature. So we were lucky.

But all in all, when we had an office with roughly 20,000 square foot of space and completely equipped with workstations and conference furniture and everything else, we probably salvaged less than 20 percent of that equipment and furniture from there because a lot of it has cloth fabric on it and it had to be remediated from mold, and it wasn't economically feasible to do that.

But I give credit to the staff that went down there. There was a crew that volunteered to go down there and work, and we salvaged a lot of equipment and, actually, I think saved the government a lot of money through their efforts in doing so.

JS: Well, it must have been difficult for those staff, not only working in conditions like that, but trying to salvage an office where you spent a great part of your life. Obviously, these people had invested a lot of their lives in the workplace that was now pretty much gone.

TT: Well, for many of the people, the personal effects they had in their office or their workstation were the only personal effects they had left. So the pictures that were on their desk or the little mementos are the few things they have left of their personal life.

So to me it was important to make sure we try to get in there and get as much of that for them as we could, because they lost hundreds of pictures and curios and just little things most people take for granted. So we were lucky in that regard because I think we salvaged a lot of stuff there.

JS: I can tell you that from the standpoint of agency history, there are staff in New Orleans that thought enough to make sure part of that history is saved. They had contacted the FDA History Office over the years to send us things from the District Office, such as incredible reference standards for raw drugs and food products, herbals and so on, that came in as part of the import operations there. And it's just a magnificent collection -- I'm sure it goes back to the '30s or '40s at least.

TT: Back when the lab was in New Orleans probably, so, yeah.

And there are people that, you know, within the agency that really value the historical perspective of the agency, and they want to keep that because they may have worked in the lab at one point in time, or maybe their entire career was spent in New Orleans.

And that was the thing about New Orleans that was pretty evident to me when I got here, was that the core staff that was here had spent most of their career here, and some people have worked for FDA for over 40 years, and they spent their entire 40-year career in the New Orleans office. So you try to factor that into the, all of a sudden after 40 years, you're forced to relocate to another city, another state. You've lost your family,

you've lost your neighborhood. You don't bounce back from that in a matter of weeks or months.

JS: Or ever.

TT: Or ever. Some people are still fighting those demons, I can assure you.

JS: How many in the staff here that were relocated to Nashville ended up going back, or ended up leaving?

TT: I just pulled those numbers the other day. I think I have 23 people back in New Orleans; I think nine people transferred to other locations; one person resigned; and about eight people stayed in Nashville.

JS: Was this pretty much in the first year or so after that?

TT: Yeah. I think the last person to go back, the most recent one moved back from here in August of this year, the first of August. And that was because they were in the process of trying to get their home rebuilt, and they'd gotten to the point where they could go back there and live. Some took longer than others.

JS: Well, I certainly intend to collect some of the stories about how this was done,

working with insurance companies and so on, because this is part of the whole travail that people face after a disaster like this that we don't really have an appreciation for.

TT: Some people are still working out the details.

JS: I can imagine.

Now, clearly, this is a magnitude that we have not seen before. There was a flood in Kansas City that wiped out a huge, huge array of regulated products and so on, but, as you said, there was nothing of this magnitude that the agency experienced before in a hundred years.

TT: Right.

JS: But without getting consumed with the magnitude of the problem, how did we work with Headquarters or with the Regional Office to try and get back up to speed with the normal, quote unquote, operations of a District Office? How long did that take? Or is it still an ongoing process?

TT: Well, I guess I came to the realization that I couldn't maintain two residences myself, so I had a discussion with the Region. I said, "I either have to live in Louisiana or I have to live in Nashville." And I said, "It really, at this point in time, it makes no difference to me. I don't have historical ties in New Orleans." I'd only been there 14

months when the hurricane ran me out of Louisiana, so I'd been the Director for 14 months in New Orleans at the time the event occurred.

So the decision was made that it was probably going to take a long time to regroup, but the intent was that we would rebuild in New Orleans, the District. But we had to evaluate the OEI (the Official Establishment Inventory), and the needs and roles of this place, and how had the storm affected the industry, and did the office need to be on the east, the west, the north, the south. Where did it need to be?

Everybody ended up moving to Baton Rouge. That city's population increased by, I think, over 100,000 people in a matter of weeks, whereas the New Orleans proper, they lost roughly 200,000 people, and many of them have not returned, and they don't expect them to return. So when you lose 200,000 people, then you also lose the infrastructure that goes with it, the medical professionals, the insurance, the car dealerships. They're not needed if you're not having to supply that number of people.

And this was one of those situations where you can't make a rash decision and say, "We're going to relocate the office to New Orleans," but maybe you really have to step back and take a look at this and say, "What's the long-term effect?" To go down there and reestablish an office right now in the same location or a similar location may not be the smartest thing in the world because another storm hits and you have just relocated, you've got to start all over again. You go through this whole rigmarole. Maybe it's not in the right location. Maybe the industry isn't there. So we're still evaluating that, and I think it's going to take another year or two, at least, to determine if that is the best location. Is it the best for the agency? Is it best for the people? We're still dealing with people down there that, every time a cloud comes up and the storms

start rolling, they become a little uneasy and start feeling uncomfortable like the hurricane left them. They're a little stressed-out, and I think that's understandable. They're still affected mentally and physically by the effects of this storm.

JS: What's your opinion?

TT: About the office? Well, when I came up here, I said, "We can establish this, we can run this district the best we can from this office for the interim, and it makes more sense to do that now with some stability." We had a better facility here, we had a better IT infrastructure here, and so we established this as the interim District Office. And my opinion at this point is I probably won't work for the agency by the time that decision is ultimately made, but that's just my opinion because, you know, I just don't see that it's going to happen that quickly.

And now we're looking at transformation of the agency, we're looking at reorganization and . . .

JS: Well, apparently not any more.

TT: Well, it's just been put in abeyance. I wouldn't say that it's over. And I think we do have to look at how we do business now because we're not the same agency we were a hundred years ago, or even 20 years ago.

I started 35 years ago, and we're not the same agency then that we are now, because technology and consumer demands and imports, those were not even issues we

were faced with on a day-to-day basis and dealing with. And terrorism has brought a whole new dimension to public health and safety. And I think we need to take a harder look at that and make sure we're covering those areas as we progress.

So it's a long way around to your question as to what the future is, and I guess the answer is I don't know what the future is. We could have a plan, we can have a goal, but I think we're going to have to adjust that plan and maybe adjust that goal as we proceed given the circumstances that we're up against.

So I think there will always be a need for an office in the New Orleans area, whether that be a single office with multiple people in it or two or three smaller offices geographically dispersed to where the work is, may be a better solution. And I would hate to make a rash decision at this point in time just based on a knee-jerk reaction to people's emotions about follow-up to a storm.

I think you may find in subsequent interviews with some people that, even though they were vehemently opposed to staying in Nashville, some of those people have relocated here don't want to go back to New Orleans or Louisiana now and can't imagine living in that environment. So in some respects it's been an eye-opener for employees that there is a bigger world out there and it's not all Gulf Coast, it's not all New Orleans. But New Orleans is a unique place.

JS: New Orleans is a city like no other culturally, gastronomically, in all kinds of ways, isn't it?

TT: You just -- it's hard to describe how culturally different it is from each location.

Each city has its own cultural diversity and its uniqueness, and that's what makes it kind of fun.

I don't know what the answer is.

JS: I suppose this is a question I might ask someone who was in Nashville at the time that the temporary relocation took place, but let me ask you your ideas. What's your idea of how the Nashville office here, how they accommodated, reacted to, helped, or whatever, when the New Orleans staff moved up here, because it obviously changed this office tremendously when that happened.

TT: Yes, it did. And everyone, like anybody else, they wanted to help, they wanted to do whatever they could, and some people went outside their comfort zone in trying to do that. And they were faced with a rollercoaster of emotions amongst the people that were displaced. And one day the person might be fine; the next day they might be a basket case, and you just had to deal with that.

There was probably a sense of frustration because you don't really grasp another person's loss if you haven't experienced something like that yourself. So each one dealt with it, but I would say for the most part, they bent over backwards to accommodate the people that were displaced, accepted them for what they had experienced and what their value was and how they were functioning at the time, and we've moved on.

We're down to where we added roughly eight people to this office, but yet, through retirements and transfers, we've probably maintained a balance about where we are. I think there's 28 people working from this location right now, and there were

probably roughly 20 to 28 people working here when the storm happened. So things change, and you can't stop that.

It's like when someone retires. You say, "I don't know what we'll do without you," and a week later you're doing without them just fine. And within a year, you don't even miss him, so to speak, as far as the work goes. You miss him as a person, but not necessarily for what they've done, because somebody else steps up for the most part.

But I think the agency as a whole is very responsive to the personal needs of the people, and I think they still would be responsive. And, in fact, the agency as a whole is responsive to the needs of anybody. You can see that through their donated-leave programs and just assisting people in times of need and always offering assistance. So there's a very good humanitarian base within the agency.

JS: Well, we're now over two years, slightly over two years from the event, from Hurricane Katrina. With the perspective of two years, how do you kind of look back at this, and what is it that we as an agency, what did we do right and what are we particularly proud of? And what could we have done maybe a little bit better, both with respect to the staff and all the issues they faced and in terms of what we do as an agency, what we're supposed to do as an agency?

TT: Well, that's a good question. I mean, I think that what we did as an agency, we did it well from the standpoint that we were very diplomatic in working with our state and federal counterparts, and we were very professional in our approach to resolving the issues that occurred.

As far as the staff that were affected by the storm, as I said before, I think the agency was very gracious to the staff, and I don't think there's anybody here that would deny we took care of the staff almost above and beyond what any expectation that I might have had. Not knowing what to expect since it's never occurred before, I think they set the bar very high in the event there's another disaster, because they have a historical baseline now of what the agency did and can do.

It's not something that you're going to get over. It's just like today's the anniversary of 9/11, which is kind of ironic in that you remember those days, you know where, I know where I was, and I know what I was doing when I heard the news. And it's just like when I see August 29th any more, I know I was sitting in the car headed north. And I don't think I'll ever forget the image of the hurricane on the radar screen the morning we left town. That's just one of those things that you're not going to forget.

So lessons learned. Historically, I think FDA feeds on information, the agency does, and there are so many people that want so much information they kind of inundate one another with requests, and in the electronic age of e-mail now, I think there needs to be some sort of clearinghouse or centralized location of how we deal with this, because you don't broadcast a message and say, "What are we doing about this?" to 40 people and expect to get one answer that's going to be in agreement with all 40 people. So I think there's a better way that we can communicate if it comes out of this.

I think that we also learned you can't write this all down in a book and you can't say, "Here's the manual on how to deal with a hurricane now," because the next one won't be the same, it won't affect the city the same way, it won't affect the people the

same way. It could be worse, it could be not as bad, and you just have to be very flexible in your approach to how you deal with these things and do what's right at the time.

I think common sense has always been a big factor in the way we do business, and I think that was very true in the way we responded to the storm. I mean, a lot of this was just common sense. We would have done this -- we would have tried to contact the people to find out if they were safe and secure even if we hadn't had a book that said we need to contact everybody. I mean, you're going to do that. It's just human nature. But yet we write this stuff down. We have to say this is what we do, and yet everybody knows that's what you're going to do. So I think we get caught up in the, I guess, the narrative . . .

TAPE 2, SIDE B

TT: It's kind of the narrative of a textbook, the mentality that we have. We have manuals for everything, and yet . . .

When I started, I had an Investigator's Manual and maybe two Compliance Programs Manuals. I think now, if you could print them on paper, you'd still have the Investigator's Manual, but your Compliance Programs Manuals would probably number in the twenties given the information we process anymore. And you're getting on overload in that regard. The Internet gives us overload with the availability of information, websites, copies of this, copies of that.

JS: During the height of this, did you feel like . . . I understand the people, especially

in Washington, want to know what's happening. But there's only so many times you can tell them, "Well, we've made contact now with another person." Or did you feel like you were reaching a point of diminishing returns as far as what information you could provide here?

TT: I think that, as you mentioned earlier, the redundancy of some of the reports you get, it's like a chronology you have to repeat every day, whereas let's just add the new information. And I don't think there's anything wrong with saying "no change," and that says it all. I mean, but there are those in Washington that apparently their job is predicated on the fact they have to have something new every day to report, so "no change" is not an adequate response. So then you come back with something else.

The unfortunate part of this is some of the people that were overseeing the response and everything did not get out into the field to really experience what the people were experiencing, so therefore they don't really understand why they didn't necessarily get the information by the deadlines they imposed, or why this was not considered as important to the person they'd requested it from as to the requester. And it's based on what you're having to do at the time, and you have to make those decisions in the field, and it's not in the book. You've got to do what you've got to do to get the job done, and sometimes you don't get everything done that somebody wanted.

From my perspective, I think rather than creating a thicker manual to deal with this, we should be creating a smaller manual that gives you a baseline or a skeletal format; and this is the minimum that you need to do or think about, and then you develop that as your event unfolds.

We didn't refer to manuals. I can honestly sit here and tell you that when I got to Nashville, I didn't get out the COOP plan and start thumbing through and say, "Okay, what's the first thing I need to do?" I went back and looked at the COOP plan after I had time to kind of rest and reflect on it, and amazingly, we pretty much followed the COOP plan as it was written. But I didn't have to read it on a daily basis to make sure I was following it. So that's why I think that common sense comes into play on a lot of this. You don't have to have everything written down.

JS: Well, it also helps having managers with a great deal of common sense in place, who have experience, and that's probably a lot more important than manuals, I think.

TT: Well, I think the work ethic, amazingly enough, there were those that basically sucked up and did what needed to be done in spite of the fact you didn't know what the status of your home or your family or what you were going to find or what the future was going to hold, but there was a job to do and you got it done, and you dealt with that other stuff when you got to it. And not everybody did it that way, and not everybody still has dealt with it. But I think most people have come back and have moved on, but yet there are those, they're not there yet.

JS: That might not make it into manuals, but maybe it should. Maybe people should understand that employees react very differently to circumstances like this. And from what you've said, the agency did find a way to accommodate people who took a while to process what they had gone through. On the other hand, I'm sure people who are into the

writing of manuals looked at this event and found another chapter to write, or edited the manual. Like I'm sure we learned things from this disaster that maybe were a little bit unusual. Even given the fact that manuals are what they are, we can probably always learn some useful things in case anything like this happens again, this once-in-a-hundred-year event.

TT: Well, the institutional knowledge that was gained from those that experienced this, it's good to somehow collect that, if we could, and use it for future reference. But that's kind of where we are as an agency. We have all this institutional knowledge that retires or leaves and we have no way to really capture it.

JS: Well, this is one way we do it, through the oral histories of the FDA History Office. I wish we could do this in a more widespread way. Unfortunately, we have a small office. But it is a way to capture the memories of a place.

Normally we do these as staff retire, and they can look back at careers and so on and offer their insights into things that happened, events. We haven't looked at a specific event like the way we are here. But I'm hopeful, and one of the reasons I'm down here -- and we're going to be down in New Orleans and Atlanta too -- is to capture these memories, and as we said before, in a way that the paper trail does not capture them. So this is one way to capture institutional history.

So, I've kept you a long time here, and I know you're very busy and I do appreciate your sitting down and talking about an event that was very painful, but also a

source of some significant pride in the way that the agency reacted to it and how you and your staff reacted to it.

Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you think we should have in this record of institutional knowledge? I mean, we could talk for days, I'm sure, but . . .

TT: I think we could.

JS: But I want to make sure, if there's something that we left out that you feel we need to just get down, that we do get it recorded.

TT: I'm sure there is something that, after you return to your office, I'll think, "Boy, I sure wish I would have told John that," but that just may, that could be for another time or another place.

It amazes me I can still sit here and recall this information, but it just furthers the effect that, you can see the impact it has on people and what we've had to deal with. So it's an event I don't want anyone else to have to experience in the agency now or in the future.

JS: Well, we do have provisions for addenda to the oral history transcript, so if something occurs to you, you can always add it to the transcript at a later time.

TT: I appreciate that.

JS: Thank you for sitting down.

TT: No problem.

END OF INTERVIEW