

Life on the hill

BRYAN COUNTY NEWS

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Carter Infinger

Chairman looking toward future for county

By Evelyn Fallon
Bryan County News

In January, Richmond Hill's Carter Infinger stepped into a new role for the county. After serving six years as Bryan County commissioner of District 4, he went all in for the opportunity to serve as chairman for the county commission.

Infinger is a full-time pharmaceutical sales representative who strives to carry the load of career, husband to wife Karen of 27 years and father to daughters Leah and Caroline. Adding chairman to his list of responsibilities has been no easy task.

Infinger is fresh off the planning, preparation and recovery phases for the state's second major hurricane in two years.

He said he is proud of the efforts that went into making this process smoother and knows the county has room to improve on many fronts.

Infinger was born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina, and obtained a business degree from Newberry College before moving to the area for a job opportunity. Now, 21 years later, Infinger is a well-known community figure and decision maker for the county.

"We have a good community. Bryan County is the 22nd fastest growing county in the state of Georgia, as of six months ago," he said. "We are a blank canvas. We all have a chance to steer and make this community better and better."

"We can't stop the growth, so we must try to make it as positive as possible. It is hard to do. People don't always understand the factors going into the decisions. We are all puzzle pieces. We are all experts in certain areas. At the end of the day, we must bring our expertise together to craft the big picture, or puzzle if you will, and bring out the best of the community."

After Hurricane Matthew hit last year, county leaders and members of the community began to face the reality of what hurricane preparedness means to a coastal community. That storm caused tree and wind damage, as well as flooding and power outages for many neighborhoods.

"We just cleared up with FEMA the first of June regarding financial reimbursements," Bryan County Emergency Services Director Freddy Howell said. "The issues largely were debris pickup, structures in the county that were damaged, city building, sewer lift stations, leasing equipment. We will get about 85 percent of every dollar spent back from FEMA and GEMA combined."

Just a few months off from closure with FEMA and dealing with Hurricane Matthew, Hurricane Irma came with a "spaghetti model" and a list of unknowns.

This time, community leaders took a different approach and began the preparation phase with full intentions of putting key figures, equipment and plans in place as quickly as possible before the storm hit.

Unlike with Matthew, GEMA, two different units of the National Guard and FEMA were in place before Irma hit the area.

"The BCES Command Center was equipped and staffed ahead of time. With Matthew it happened during and after," Infinger explained. "Ben Taylor, county administrator, and Freddy Howell, Bryan County Emergency Services fire chief made, sure the appropriate people were in place."

"The National Guard showed up the Friday before Irma and did not deploy until Tuesday. The phone lines were activated in advance. There was 35-45 pieces of equipment strategically placed around the county and ready to go. Fifty to 60 people also strategically placed and ready to move out as needed," he continued. "So much went into being prepared. So many people don't realize how much goes into this."

Along with these efforts was the BCES Black Hawk that was placed in city limits to serve as the city command center. The sheer undertaking of getting people and equipment in place was only half the battle.

"Even down to considering what we were feeding everyone, we were so much more prepared for this," said Infinger.

The delegation was there and people knew what role they were expected to play.

"Everyone had their role and they did an excellent job. Our firefighters and paramedics came in and never left," Infinger said.

The storm surge caused flooding and damage to many local dock owners. But as the water receded, first responders could assess damage, and locals were able to get back to life and business soon after Hurricane Irma.

County leaders are still waiting on official data



CARTER INFINGER

File photo

Carter Infinger sits in the commission meeting room.

that will provide insight on storm surge and wind speeds. This information is set to arrive in the coming weeks. The estimated cost incurred is still unknown.

"There was 400-man hours dedicated to Hurricane Irma," Infinger said. "We do our part and want to see this community come together in all scenarios. I want people to know what goes on behind the scenes. We are thinking about so many details when planning the processes to prepare, endure and recover from these types of situations."

With Irma in the rearview mirror, Infinger looks to the future for Bryan County.

"We are fortunate, many counties are still dealing with the aftermath of this," he said.

Like Irma, the county's future also holds many unknowns — growth, schools, infrastructure, roadways, policies and procedures, recreation and more. Infinger said he feels responsible for seeing a long-term plan for the county.

"We have to think big. We need to establish standards for builders, business owners and locals that are fair," he said. "We need to work on finding a happy medium. This county can be anything we want it to be. It is a blank slate right now."

Life on the hill || Q/A: COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR BEN TAYLOR



A man who answers to Carter Infinger as chairman of the Bryan County Commission answers this week's questions.

Q: What is your name and current job title?

A: Ben Taylor, county administrator

Q: How has Carter Infinger impacted the county with his role as chairman?

A: Carter has helped to bring a progressive movement into the county as an organization, even before he was chairman. He recognizes that the organization must grow and adapt with the increasing population within its borders. He also has the patience and persistence to see this transformation through.

Q: How do you feel the county responded to handling the preparation and aftermath of Hurricane Irma?

A: For the most part, we were prepared. We learned a lot from Hurricane Matthew. We also learned a lot from this event as well. Matthew was particularly wind, while Irma introduced the flooding aspect.

Q: Moving forward, do you see areas of improvement

as far as community preparations are concerned?

A: Regarding community preparations, I would say stay calm and please heed the recommended evacuation requests.

Q: In what ways do you feel the community can play a bigger role in preparing and enduring future unpredictable weather conditions, such as tropical storms, hurricanes, etc.?

A: Continue to look out for your neighbor and fellow citizens. I have heard so many examples of neighbor helping neighbor, whether it be prior to the storm, during or in the immediate aftermath. I hope that dedication to each other is something our community never loses.

File photo
County Administrator
Ben Taylor

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