

## **UWO staff rises to challenges left in flood's wake**

by **David Williams - Tuesday, September 09, 2008**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1217/uwo-staff-rises-to-challenges-left-in-floods-wake/>

When University of Wisconsin Oshkosh students arrived for a new semester last week, it was hard to imagine that a major disaster had impacted every building on campus a mere two-and-a-half months ago.

The fact that UW Oshkosh facilities were ready to accommodate faculty, staff and students on the first day of classes, Sept. 3, is a testament to the University administration and employees' diligence in contending with the damage left in the wake of the worst flood to hit Wisconsin in recent history.

While the days following the June 12-13 flood are something of a blur for Steve Arndt, the University's facilities maintenance director, he clearly remembers sloshing through the basement of Clow with Chancellor Richard Wells sometime before midnight.

A few hours before that impromptu tour of campus, Arndt received a phone call at home from University Police.

"They said, 'The entire campus is flooded.' I said, 'Come on. The entire campus can't be flooded,' and they said, 'We're getting calls from everywhere,'" Arndt recalled.

Braving flooded city streets — between 50 and 75 percent of Oshkosh's streets were impassable — Arndt returned to the University, as did two plumbers and the grounds supervisor. After a quick look around campus, he knew he needed to call in more of his crew — including individuals who were contending with flooding at their own homes.

"The facilities team is very dedicated. All of my supervisors came in," Arndt said. "We took assessments and mitigated the damage as best we could."

Addressing the urgent facilities issues wasn't the only concern for University administration; the campus community needed to be informed of what was transpiring, according to Jeannette DeDietmar, executive director of the Integrated Marketing and Communications (IMC) department.

After evaluating the condition of campus with Arndt, Chancellor Wells activated the crisis communication team and contacted key campus constituents and IMC.

Between midnight and 1 a.m. June 13, IMC initiated its issues communication plan, releasing a severe weather announcements and facility reports via campus-wide e-mail, on the UW Oshkosh homepage ([www.uwosh.edu](http://www.uwosh.edu)), at UW Oshkosh Today ([www.uwosh.edu/news](http://www.uwosh.edu/news)) and on the University's weather line (424-0000).

In the weeks that followed, IMC worked with Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services Tom Sonnleitner and Arndt to provide the campus community with timely updates, including the relocation of

offices and summer classes as well as progress on repairs and cleanup throughout campus.

“While tragic, the flood also provided the University with an opportunity to measure and enhance the crisis communications strategy,” DeDiemar said.

On the weekend following the flood — Father’s Day weekend — the University’s custodial crew was called in for mandatory overtime, extracting water, tearing out dry wall, replacing flooring, disposing of water-logged materials and relocating some faculty offices. Jim Johnson, the University’s risk manager, immediately contacted emergency response contractors Paul Davis Restoration and ServPro to help with the cleanup.

In the first four days, about 1,000 hours of regular and overtime hours were dedicated to flood cleanup by UW Oshkosh permanent, limited-term and student employees, said Johnson, who, in addition to coordinating with the contractor crews, worked with the insurance adjuster for the state’s insurance.

To keep everyone on the same page, Arndt, Johnson and delegates from the contractors and insurance companies held daily strategy meetings. Over time, they began meeting twice a week.

“We had a tremendous amount of work to do in a short time, and we got it done,” Arndt said. “My entire department stepped up to the plate, as they always do in emergencies. I’m very proud of the performance of my staff under these trying circumstances.”

Arndt also was appreciative of the campus community, which remained patient and understanding throughout the cleanup process.

The basement of River Center was entirely submerged, rendering that conference center inoperable for the foreseeable future. However, that is the only disruption of service on campus today.

“Classes have started, and all of the classrooms were ready to go. All of our faculty have offices. I think we did a fine job,” Arndt said.

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