Open letter: October 10, 2016

WSNC Members

***Can’t fight Mother Nature***

***Well, You Can but You Won’t Win!***

Peggy Saporito deserves accolades of the highest order. She worked very, very had this past year getting our Manteo Event in order. She, along with Faye Edwards and Chris Swain of DCAC and all her volunteers, worked diligently and thoroughly. They did a great job planning an impeccable event. They made it so easy for the WSNC Board of Directors. We found them to be a very finely tuned machine and every single detail was covered in triplicate.

Then other things took control…who would ever expect such a destructive hurricane to strike North Carolina in October, and be one that could achieve such havoc!

Peggy, Kathy Bovard and I tried very hard to salvage what we could once we realized last Wednesday afternoon that everything was on the verge of collapse. Difficult decisions were arrived at based on facts known at that minute. A brutal aspect was that those facts kept evolving and changing.

After all the weekend events were cancelled, the workshop still seemed doable. Saturday, the day the hurricane struck North Carolina, nothing was as expected. Manteo seem to have avoided the brunt of the storm’s forces. Central Carolina was slammed.

Mark Mehaffey arranged to fly in to Norfolk on Sunday morning and drive to Manteo. Kathy Bovard, and her husband Gary, had settled in the Surfside Hotel on Thursday to help the Manteo crew hang the show, and assist Mark Mehaffey when he came to judge the show. Plans were made to go ahead with a Sunday opening of the WSNC Exhibition at DCAC for the local people and sponsors at the Dare County Arts Council.

Well, come Sunday, everything changed again.

As I loaded my car for my own Manteo departure from little Washington I was actually looking forward to my little sojourn because at my home which is 150 yards from the Pamlico River (which had already crested its banks and receded),we had no power; we were under water restrictions; and imposed curfews. I figured my stay in Manteo was going to be a much better situation and a reprieve from my own current state of affairs.

Then all hell broke loose again. First, almost all of Dare County lost electricity. That meant no phone service for many, no internet, no tv nor radio – in other words, no way to know what was happening. Due to downed live electrical lines laying in standing water, very strong winds, and impassible, water-covered roadways, Dare County imposed a Mandatory Evacuation order at 11 am Sunday morning. No one was allowed to leave or enter Dare county. We were hopeful we could still have the workshop if the judge could get into Manteo because at that point there had been little rain or wind Friday or Saturday, the ocean had stayed put for the most part, and there was little to no flooding downtown. Well, none of this was true by Sunday.

Norfolk also was in the tail end of the hurricane. On Sunday, Mark Mehaffey landed in Atlanta only to discover that he would be unable to complete his journey to Norfolk and his drive to Manteo. There was no ability to promise him any changes to that fact anytime in the near future. Understandably, he took a return flight home, offering to return if/when weather allowed and power was restored. As of this writing, there is still very little power, and the people at the Surfside Hotel guessed they may have power restored by Wednesday or Thursday at the earliest.

Kathy was sequestered in the motel, without power, strong surf pounding just yards away, wicked high winds and all restaurants and businesses shut tight throughout the Outer Banks. Winds were so strong, Hotel staff locked doors and kept people inside. By Sunday afternoon, a curfew was announced for Dare County. By Sunday night, hotel staff brought in a tiny generator for coffee and, later, a platter of hotdogs to feed their 15 or so occupants. Her weekend was spent in a dark room, on the 4th floor, with no elevator service.

Peggy Saporito, who by now hasn’t slept in about three days, was still manning her post, trying, in vain, to again address the newest current state of affairs. Cell phones are dead but you could drive around in your car to recharge as long as you weren’t caught on the road and Internet is nonexistent everywhere. The three of us rallied to get out the information in whatever manner we could. We relayed information to folks in Raleigh who had power (literally) and the ability to disseminate this turn of events. To our dismay it was not timely enough for some.

We beg you indulgence. We apologize. We tried our best. We just could do no more.

In the end the storm won. And we had to capitulate.

I am in little Washington this Monday morning with no power, no cell phone, no generator, mandated water restrictions and curfew, no internet. I have no source of information except the local grapevine and we have been told to standby for local flooding, perhaps as bad as Floyd and Dennis, as all the water dumped in central Carolina basins by the storm drains to the coast.

Kathy and her husband are still stuck in Manteo. Hopefully they will be allowed to leave today, but Manteo officials warned of two to three days before restrictions are lifted. Peggy is still cleaning up the debris. We are working with Mark Mehaffey to get him in late this week to judge the show, but do not yet know if this is doable. And, to top it all off, WSNC finances are in desperate need of assessment.

Everyone is bone tired.

To our members—your patience and understanding is appreciated