



## COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS



### Keeping Residents Healthy & Safe Through Hurricane Sandy

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy it might seem appropriate to tout the important elements of emergency preparedness such as stocking up with flashlights, batteries, water and non-perishable food, and having a “go-bag” ready in case there is a need to evacuate. These are indeed all important precautions to put in place.

However, I feel compelled to depart from my usual approach, and also to report some of the behind-the-scenes work performed by the Putnam County government to keep us all safe.

The Health Department, and other county agencies, helped prepare and assist community residents during and after the storm. The Health Department was by no means alone in our efforts. Law enforcement, emergency services, highway and transportation, and the County Executive’s office were all on 24-hour duty, based at Putnam County’s Emergency Operations Center, working to protect and serve the residents of Putnam County.

Situations continually emerged and a committed, efficient team responded. Even before all road hazards were eliminated, the Health Department had dispatched a truck convoy to deliver cots and blankets to the shelters. To divert a potentially catastrophic public health problem, environmental health department staffers assisted in prioritizing power restoration to sewage treatment facilities.

In addition to these early challenges, public health nurses staffed over-night shelters that were still operational even a week after the super storm’s initial impact and our Medical Reserve Corps staff coordinated the selfless efforts of dozens of volunteers needed in an effective and streamlined manner. Food safety issues, related to the loss of power and refrigeration, were another serious concern that our environmental and communications teams needed to address. In fact all members of the Health Department, from clerical to supervisory colleagues, stood ready and eager to assist as needed and many were called upon.

With each emergency situation, responses improve and are refined—both on a county and individual level. The future is sure to bring more challenges yet and I am happy to report the Department of Health is ready.

*Allen Beals is Putnam’s Health commissioner and writes monthly for the Courier.*