

Storm Warning

Even when the weather rages and destruction reigns, America's school nutrition professionals demonstrate just how well they rise and shine.

BY PATRICIA L. FITZGERALD, WITH ARIANNE CORBETT, RD, AND CECILY WALTERS

"I'm not sure you're ever totally prepared to handle a disaster. You can learn what to do in case of a fire or a power outage, but no textbook talks about an earthquake." Randy Herman, SNS, director of school nutrition services for Louisa County Public Schools in Mineral, Va., is still trying to process being near the epicenter of last year's unfathomable East Coast earthquake.

After all, few of us truly anticipate that a natural disaster will happen "here" to "us." We watch the news reports, send up a prayer, make a donation, volunteer our time and count our blessings to be spared completely or that it wasn't worse. This article offers plenty of inspiration and some valuable lessons learned from some of those who rose to challenges Mother Nature presented.

WHEN THE EARTH MOVED

"I don't say 'I've had a bad day' anymore."



The 2011-12 school year had gotten off to a stressful start for Randy Herman, SNS, director of school nutrition services for Louisa County Public Schools in Mineral, Va., home to about 1,430 students. The early weeks of the school year found her putting out small "fires" and working long hours to ensure all of the work got done. Then on the eighth day of the school year, Tuesday, August 23, 2011, at 1:51 p.m., the event now known as the 2011 Virginia Earthquake hit. The epicenter of the 5.8 magnitude quake was in Louisa County, five miles from Mineral and 38 miles from Richmond, Va., the state's capital.

Because of the hectic pace of the start of school, Herman had gone home for lunch to decompress and return with a fresh perspective. But as she turned the key in her car to head back to her office, the earthquake hit. "I flew back to school as fast as I could and got the kids—including at the high school, where they had just ended lunch—and staff evacuated," she recalls.

According to local news reports, damage in Louisa County alone was estimated at \$80.6 million, of which the vast majority, \$63.8 million, was damage to public school buildings. When it comes to residential damage, Herman

acknowledges that she was among the lucky ones. "I had some surface cracks but no structural damage," she says. "Some houses had to be lifted off their foundations, and some of my staff lost their homes."

The town of Mineral would go on to experience more than 120 aftershocks, including one as late as July 2012 as this article was being prepared! The worst, just 12 hours later, was measured at a 4.8 magnitude. Herman and the district's facilities director were still onsite at the school doing damage assessment and moving food. "We were in the walk-in cooler when a 4.5 aftershock hit. It was scary," she remembers.

The school nutrition program sustained \$14,000 in food loss, including a week's worth of produce and milk deliveries. "But our 3,000 fresh peaches were safe!" she exclaims, looking back and laughing slightly. They saved \$10,000 in food by moving it to their central warehouse.

One elementary school and the district's high school were deemed too damaged to reopen; both were closed, first for the remainder of the school year and ultimately permanently. (New construction is scheduled to be completed in 2014-15.) High school students were moved to the middle school; and to prevent over-crowding, students alternated days, including every other Saturday. For the two elementary sites that merged, tennis courts at one had to be leveled to accommodate 48 trailers. For Herman and her team, the challenge was to go from feeding 350 students to 1,000 children—at the district's smallest cafeteria. Herman says, "While we were experiencing all of these challenges, I just kept thinking, 'We have to feed the kids.'"

Fortunately, she had help in meeting the challenge: Directors from neighboring districts checked in to ask how they could help and affirmed Herman's different approaches and strategies. Distributors also reached out. But there is nothing like the way a community closes ranks in the face of disaster. "An event like this makes you realize what a great community you have," Herman avows. Teachers shared classrooms, volunteers helped to move furniture from one site to another. Farmers and business owners offered trucks. Donations of money and school supplies came from all across the country.

While her district made up some time at the end of the 2011-12 school year, Herman determined that her department lost 68 serving days—and 100,000 meals—as a result of the earthquake. Thus, she's most grateful that all staff members were able to keep their jobs. "I have 43 employees, and I gave them all medals of honor at the end of last school year. They listened to me and did a fantastic job," she credits.

On a personal level, the experience has taught Herman "not to sweat the small stuff. I don't say, 'I've had a bad day' anymore," she explains. Herman also is pleased that the merging of schools offered an unexpected consequence: a renewed focus on training. And of course, she will never forget how her community came together. "People learned to care about each other and work together," she says, with pride.

A brief summary of the specific natural disasters referenced in this article.



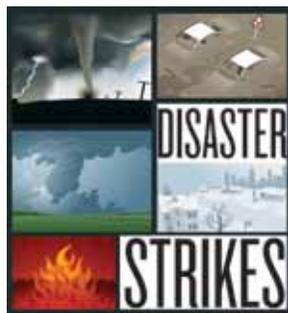
- **North American Blizzard of 2009:** The first of four major snowstorms to hit states in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast in the Winter of 2009-10, the blizzard brought high winds, white-out conditions and record-breaking December snowfall totals (between 16 and 30 inches), virtually paralyzing the "bull's-eye" cities: Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Philadelphia. The nor'easter hit the last weekend before Christmas, resulting in an estimated loss of \$2 billion in retail sales.
- **"Snowmagedon" and "Snowpocalypse":** Weary residents and the media coined these terms to refer collectively to three blizzards that successively hit the U.S. East Coast over a 12-day period in February 2010. Among the most crippling was the widespread 20-35 inches of snow dropped in the Mid-Atlantic region. The cumulative weight of the snow caused several roof collapses in affected areas. In many communities, schools remained closed for much of the month.
- **April 25-28, 2011 Tornado Outbreak:** The largest single-system tornado outbreak ever recorded, it also was considered one of the costliest and deadliest. Across the four-day period, the National Weather Service confirmed a total of 358 tornadoes in 21 states between Texas and southern Canada. A record 205 tornadoes touched down on April 27 alone. In total 348, people were killed; the vast majority—238—were in Alabama.
- **2011 Joplin Tornado:** This catastrophic F5 tornado struck Joplin, Mo., in the late afternoon on Sunday, May 22. With estimated winds over 200 mph, it reached a maximum width in excess of 1 mile as it cut a path through the southern part of the city. The tornado claimed the lives of 161 people; it was considered the deadliest tornado in America since 1947. Thousands of buildings were destroyed, and approximately 75% of the city experienced some level of damage.
- **2011 Souris River Flood:** Massive rainfall in Canada added to a thick snowpack and prompted an overflow of several rivers stretching into the northern plains states. On June 24, the Souris River topped levees in Minot, N.D. It was declared a "once-in-a-century" flood, outstripping the destruction inflicted the last time the river topped its banks in 1969 and surpassing the flood-level record set back in 1881. More than 11,000 people—one-quarter of the city's population—were displaced.

Source: www.wikipedia.org

A brief summary of the specific natural disasters referenced in this article.

- **2011 Virginia Earthquake:** A very rare—and surprisingly strong—Eastern United States earthquake was recorded on August 23, 2011, at 1:51 p.m. The epicenter was 5 miles south-southwest of Mineral, Va., but the intensity of the 5.8 magnitude quake was felt in the nation’s capital and stretched through more than a dozen states. It matched the largest recorded quake occurring east of the Rocky Mountains back in 1897. Structural damage to buildings was recorded as far away as Baltimore. A number of historic buildings in Washington, D.C., including Washington National Cathedral, the Smithsonian Castle, Lee House and the Washington Monument, are undergoing lengthy and expensive repairs.
- **Hurricane Irene:** The ninth named storm of the 2011 Atlantic hurricane season, Irene is considered the fifth costliest hurricane in history. It made its first landfall in the Outer Banks of North Carolina on August 27. While wind damage persisted as the post-tropical storm moved inland and north through New England, the extent of severe flooding was truly disastrous, closing roads, carrying off historic covered bridges, destroying numerous homes and businesses and leaving hundreds of thousands without power for a week or more. More than 50 deaths were associated with this storm.
- **2011 Halloween Nor’easter:** This late October storm broke snowfall accumulation records in at least 20 cities. Trees that were largely still in leaf could not bear the extra weight of the heavy wet snow—especially after the stress of wind and water damage from Hurricane Irene just two months earlier. Snapped limbs and downed trees caused widespread power outages, and the length of the blackouts (especially in hard-hit Connecticut) broke records. Many communities were forced to cancel and prohibit Halloween-related activities.
- **January 22-23, 2012 Tornado Outbreak:** Alabama was once again particularly hard hit by an early outbreak of tornadoes that did significant damage in Birmingham, the state’s largest, most-populated city.
- **Waldo Canyon Fire:** This forest fire started approximately 4 miles northwest of Colorado Springs, Colo., on June 23, 2012. Declared the most destructive in the state’s history, it caused the evacuation of more than 32,000 residents of several area communities and part of the U.S. Air Force Academy, destroyed nearly 350 homes and closed U.S. Highway 24, a major east-west road, in both directions for several days. Strong, erratic winds, low humidity and high temperatures caused the fire to accelerate, spread and intensify quickly before being declared 100% contained on July 10, 2012.

Source: www.wikipedia.org



HOPE FOR THE BEST; PLAN FOR THE WORST

“You always have to plan, whether it is a ‘natural’ disaster or not.”

Have a plan, then a backup plan, then a contingency plan,” asserts earthquake “survivor” Randy Herman, SNS, from Mineral, Va. “After all, we can’t just *not* serve our kids, so think about what you would do if this happened tomorrow.”

In Arlington County, Va., Foodservice Director Amy Maclosky had emergency plans in place—but finds holes and ways to improve processes each time a new crisis rears its head. For example, during the successive blizzards of Winter 2009-10, although the power outages were more widespread than planned for, she and her team were able to be flexible and figure out where to move and store food to minimize loss. ▶

QUICK TIP

Keep a “sole” stash.

Being spared in a community disaster can open your eyes to making savvy emergency preparations. In Joplin, Mo., Child Nutrition Director Rick Kenkel witnessed different ways his neighbors were and were not prepared when a tornado struck. It prompted him to stock his basement with an emergency supply of food and water—and one other item. After hearing the tornado alarm, which provides only scant minutes to take cover, he and his family ran to their basement barefoot. “Luckily, our home was safe, and we were able to retrieve our shoes. For the people in the path, however, many lost all their clothes and shoes along with their homes, and then they were walking around in the debris barefoot. Now, we keep shoes in the basement.”



On the other hand, Maclosky notes, “We did not have a plan in place to deal with paying employees if we were out of school for an extended period of time. This forced us to look at our personnel policy. The employees were out for nine days; unfortunately, I had to make the decision to pay only for the first three days, and that’s now our policy.” It was an agonizing decision for Maclosky, who knows many members of her team live paycheck to paycheck. But now, she reiterates the policy every year, so that employees can make their own financial preparations, should disaster occur.

In nearby Prince George’s County (Md.) Schools, Director of Food and Nutrition Services Joan Shorter also found that her emergency plan was only as good as the circumstances planned for; that is, it’s very hard to plan for the *unexpected*. “The snowstorms were tough, because the kids were out for so long. We lost a lot of food because of power outages, and [with so many roads closed], we couldn’t get to the schools to move [it] the food. We were thrown off schedule with menus and ordering.”

Two years later, Shorter and her team faced a different scenario, one the region hadn’t experienced in the last century: a rare East Coast earthquake. “Some of our schools were able to reopen within a day, while others weren’t. When you have a snow day, everything shuts down, not a few buildings here and there. Some of our schools had severe damage; we couldn’t stay in the building and had to move everything out.” Shorter advises her peers to think through *all* the possibilities, including a gas leak or water main break.

Perhaps the sagest advice comes from Supervisor of Nutrition Services Patricia Cunningham in Seaford, Del. She notes that in school nutrition, disasters come in all shapes and sizes and occur almost daily. “You *always* have to plan, whether it is a ‘natural’ disaster or not.”

KEEP ON TRUCKIN’

“You could see the sky.”

The Mid-Atlantic states comprised the bull’s-eye for the blizzards in 2009-10, and while bigger cities got most of the headlines, smaller communities certainly weren’t left unscathed. Take Seaford, Del., which saw a roof collapse at one school—right over the kitchen and dining room. “You could see the sky,” recounts Patricia Cunningham, supervisor of nutrition services for Seaford School District. “We had to call in the fire department to deem if we could even walk through the building. ... Thank goodness the kids were out for a snow day.”

Fortunately, the building was not a total loss, but it meant salvaging as much food and equipment as possible from the damaged area and setting up service and dining in the school gym—including installation of plumbing, electrical, hand sink, etc.—all within three to four days’ time. That only solved part of the problem; the meals needed to be prepped at another school and transported. Cunningham found herself behind the wheel of a moving-style box truck with a lift gate. “I was a nervous wreck,” she confesses of driving the truck on the highway. “I had never driven a truck before; I was scared to death. ... But I managed to do it.”

Once she’d safely delivered the truck, regular daily transportation was the responsibility of her staff, to whom Cunningham gives enormous credit. “The staff gave it their all. They truly care for their students. This was really physical work—they became truck drivers, they became haulers. They even had to take the truck to the gas station to fill it with diesel.”

With a 75% free/reduced-price eligibility rate, the children of Seaford “really need this meal,” says Cunningham. “When you have children that need to be fed, you do what you need to do. We didn’t skip a beat.”



KEEP ON TRUCKIN' REDUX

"I never thought I would see this happen twice in my career—and it happened twice in two months."

No one in Connecticut will forget Fall 2011; certainly not Susan Maffe, RD, SNS, foodservice director for Meriden School District. It was the season for power outages, with much of the state enduring a one-two punch from Hurricane Irene in August followed by the Halloween Nor'easter. While Maffe doesn't typically get worked up when she watches the weather forecast, the predictions for Hurricane Irene had her "scared to death." Not for her personal safety—Maffe was just very aware that the 30-year-old school that houses all her frozen food deliveries had no generator, and she'd just taken receipt of enough food to stock 13 production kitchens for the beginning of the school year.

Her boss agreed to her request to rent a frozen trailer—and Maffe got the last one available in Connecticut and the neighboring states. "It saved us," she recounts, because while her primary freezer did not lose power, many other sites did, and her walk-ins were warming up even faster than she'd thought they would in the August temperatures.

Crisis averted, school opened, her program got great press for being able to pitch in and feed the community. "Then the October snowstorm hit, and we weren't so prepared. I never thought I would see this happen twice in my career—and it happened twice in two months," laments Maffe.

The snow started on Saturday; Maffe had no luck calling truck rental companies or making reservations online. Fortunately, her prime vendor, a family-owned company in business for 60 years, "really stepped up to the plate," she credits. By Monday morning, her vendor delivered a frozen trailer. But with 10 schools out of power, Maffe needed to lessen her potential refrigerated losses. "First thing in the morning, I drove to the lobby of a truck building and waited until they opened. I knew that anyone else trying to call over the weekend wouldn't have gotten through either." Her perseverance paid off and she got her refrigerated truck—an investment that saved thousands. "In the future, that will be the first call I make," she promises.

→ → → QUICK TIP

"I need to know where my people are and are they okay?"

Following two series of tornadoes "My biggest [operational] takeaway is having a good phone tree," reflects Sonja Anthony, SNS, child nutrition program director, Jefferson County School District, in Birmingham, Ala. She can't stress enough the value of having this for the personal aspect alone. "A building can be replaced, but I need to know where my people are and are they okay? I couldn't contact all 390 employees, but my supervisory staff contacted area specialists, who contacted managers, who contacted their employees. Eventually, everyone was accounted for."

Anthony's management team has cell and home numbers—and she also advises adding some instruction regarding text messaging in formal disaster policies. "It was the only form of communication that worked for us."

Another set of numbers Anthony found invaluable was a list of companies that could assist with storage and refrigerated/freezer trucks. "These are numbers I keep with me to contact immediately." She also keeps the numbers for neighboring school districts, as they might be able to lend storage and maintenance assistance.



PERSPECTIVE

“Unbelievable’ would be an understatement.”

Devastating tornadoes swept through highly populated areas of Jefferson County, Ala., in April 2011 and struck again January 2012. “Unbelievable’ would be an understatement,” says Sonja Anthony, SNS, child nutrition program director. In the April 2011 outbreak, called the “Tuscaloosa storm” by locals, the schools in the storm’s path suffered fairly minimal structural damage. “Unfortunately, this was not the case for many families,” laments Anthony. A staff member at the district’s central office was killed. A school custodian who had lost her home in a 1998 tornado, lost her new home—and her life—in the April storm.

In addition, one of Anthony’s own employees lost her daughter to the deadly storm. When schools reopened a week later, her employee returned to work. “She just wanted to be with her CNP ‘family,’” explains Anthony. “So, of course, we all just lost it. [Returning to work] gave her some degree of normalcy, but above everything, it was a beacon of strength for everyone else. It put things in perspective. Losing a home is one thing, but a daughter....”

FEEDING “NEW” CUSTOMERS

“It turned out to be positive PR for the school lunch program.”

In 2011, when the rains fell—and fell and fell—in upstate New York as the “remnants” of Hurricane Irene raced northward, whole communities were left under water. While the two schools in Schoharie Central School District were safe on high ground, the same could not be said for many of the homes of area students; in fact, about 80% of the buildings in the village were flooded. As a consequence, an interesting federal program came to the attention of School Foodservice Manager Josie Ennist, SNS. “I learned about the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The families [in our community] who were displaced are eligible for free meals for the rest of the year. Our free/reduced percentage went up by 10%,” she notes.

And some of the families that had never looked twice at school meals were now grateful for—and impressed by—the program. “We had some really well-to-do families who would have never tried school lunch who relied on our program that year,” Ennist reports. “I actually have had people stop me in the grocery store and thank me for feeding their kids, saying how great it was not to worry about lunch money or packing meals during the aftermath.”

EQUIPPED FOR ANYTHING

“We wanted to be sure nothing was shaken out of place.”

Pavel Matustik, SNS, chief executive officer, Santa Clarita Valley (Calif.) School Food Services Agency, will never forget the major 1994 earthquake that left a 10-in. gap in the middle of his central kitchen floor. The experience resulted in some practical changes—and advice he can offer to his counterparts in other regions of the country.

- In warehouses and storage areas: “Don’t overload shelves—even the best shelving on the market,” he notes. “We had nice new shelving, but if you pack it wrong, no matter how good it is, it will not help you. Now, we always store heavy things on the bottom and light on the top.”
- All equipment is now on castors. This can be handy in lower-intensity quakes and high winds, allowing the equipment to “give” slightly without shaking and breaking. Matustik also recommends quick-release hoses and cords. These small changes also are helpful preparations for storms with high winds.
- Be prepared to shelter in place. Matustik knows it was simple good luck that the last major earthquake happened in the middle of the night, and no children or employees were in school facilities. But now, every school stores an emergency supply of water and basic snacks for double the current enrollment—in fact, this is now a requirement in his district. In addition, there are emergency kits stored in an outdoor location, so they are still accessible if there is structural damage to a building and it is deemed unsafe to enter.

Even earthquake “newbie” Joan Shorter in Prince George’s County, Md., now can contribute sage advice to this point. “We did a safety check of every piece of equipment in the district. Since the ground shifted, we wanted to make sure to look at all our equipment and check parts to be sure nothing was shaken out of place,” she notes.

When there is a natural disaster, “our life line is the maintenance department,” credits Jefferson County’s Sonja Anthony. You can’t prepare for the damage caused by a tornado, but the maintenance team is vital for making assessments and arranging for dry ice for coolers.



“LUNCH” IN THE CLASSROOM

“Some homes even had their basements collapse.”

For two months, the city of Minot, N.D., tried to hold back the surging Souris River. But in June 2011, the river won. More than 4,200 individual homes were lost. “The water sat in them so long, they had to strip everything down to the structure. All electricity, plumbing, drywall was ruined. Some homes even had their *basements* collapse,” recounts April Carlson, a foodservice manager in Minot Public Schools. “The city was devastated. More than 11,000 people were displaced.” So few stores were left standing that the nearby Minot Air Force Base opened its commissary to residents to buy groceries.

Two schools in the district—one elementary and one middle—were considered total losses. “The middle school held one of our central kitchens, so that was really tough,” notes Carlson. Elementary students went to class in a city auditorium, while the middle school was set up in a church. Some students are being taught in trailers.

But the school nutrition program carries on. “At one school, we delivered sack lunches in the classroom from August to December,” recounts Carlson. Breakfast was served in the library—which also is the site for the milk cooler. With pride, she notes that the school stayed on the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, using prepackaged items. “We found a way to do it.”

→ → → QUICK TIP

Solving a cash crisis.

In many school districts, nutrition services staff, especially hourly employees, do not get paid when they don’t work. This can be a real burden in the wake of a natural disaster, when employees also may be coping with personal losses, damages and unexpected expenses. In Meriden, Conn., Foodservice Director Susan Maffe, RD, SNS, found a way to help her staff get through the unexpected time off prompted by a freak October snowstorm. “In their contract, the staff gets a longevity bonus and uniform allowance,” she explains. “That’s usually given in the first paycheck in December. We...got the union to agree to give that [money] after the October snowstorm, so they could get some pay during that time.”



→ → → QUICK TIP

“Where did I put my keys?”

In the wake of successive storms causing extended power outages, Susan Maffe, RD, SNS, foodservice director for the Meriden (Conn.) School District, learned one lesson the hard way. “Don’t believe you have the keys to everything [in the operation]—make sure you do *beforehand*,” she advises. “We learned to keep better track of keys and who has access to them.” During Hurricane Irene, Maffe had trouble tracking down “key” people. That led her to create a new system, leaving keys in certain designated areas. But when the Halloween Nor’easter rolled into town, “We found out we didn’t have keys to everything—like newer equipment, which had extra locks, in addition to our padlocks.” Maffe is convinced that she’s now “unlocked” the secret to managing this problem in the face of the next disaster.

SUNDAY, MAY 22

“It was a building-by-building decision whether we were able to salvage anything.”

The Class of 2011 had just graduated, and families were disassembling for private celebrations. Rick Kenkel doesn’t recall any advance severe weather warnings, but the sky was getting gray and ugly as he and his family returned home from a shopping trip. Then, with only 10 minutes warning, the tornado alarms sounded in Joplin, Mo.

Eleven miles long. Not a very long path, as tornadoes go. But a full mile wide. And packing the force of 200+ mph winds. The F5 tornado cut through one-third of a densely populated section of the 40,000-resident community, leaving utter devastation in its wake. In addition to more than 150 lives lost, roughly 8,000 dwellings were demolished. While Kenkel’s home, a half-mile from the path, was spared, four of his 90 Joplin R-VIII child nutrition employees experienced a total loss, with others cleaning up varying levels of damage.

The high school, two elementary schools and a “new” (opened only two years prior) middle school were destroyed. “It was a building-by-building decision whether we were able to salvage anything,” he recounts. The remaining eight days of school were cancelled. Still, Child Nutrition Director Kenkel and his team worked to have their Summer Food Service Program up and running. (“We definitely had more students enrolled than we have in years past,” he notes.)

In the meantime, Kenkel and district officials needed to figure out long-term “temporary” sites to teach kids in the fall. Among the solutions: The high school was relocated to the local mall, which had a large, empty retail space; the middle school is being housed at what had been an under-construction pet food store (“It still had dirt floors,” he recounts).

Kenkel’s team uses three mobile kitchens in the parking lots of the temporary school sites. Each is basically two to three semis bolted together. (“They are ‘mobile’ because you can take them apart,” he explains.) One is used for cooking, another for washing and a third for prep. He also has separate trailers for cold, frozen and dry storage. The food is transported from the “kitchen” to the “school” in food carts.

At press time, there’s “not a brick laid yet for any of the new schools,” Kenkel reports. So, he and his staff expect to be relying on those mobile kitchens for up to three more years. He is undaunted. “We have good staff; they are up and running; this is the new norm.” And in the spirit of the “new normal,” Kenkel is pressing forward with his plans to apply for Silver awards in the HealthierUS School Challenge program for Joplin’s elementary schools.

→ → → QUICK TIP

“One of my biggest blessings was to have all our small equipment on a computer inventory.”

Rick Kenkel, in Joplin, Mo., was grateful that his operation had the practice of keeping a computer inventory record for all food products, as well as all small and large equipment. It certainly came in handy when filing the insurance claim for the four school kitchens that were destroyed by the May 2011 tornado. “One school lost 180 sheet pans. How do you know how many sheet pans you have? If you have a paper inventory in the school and lose the building, that information is gone.”



COPE WITH HOPE

“School foodservice is so different from any other business.”

There is always a silver lining,” says Patricia Cunningham of Seaford, Del. For her, a snow-induced roof collapse enabled her staff to work together and learn what could be done under duress, coming together to get the kids fed. “All experiences are learning processes,” she notes.

In Santa Clarita, Calif., one enduring memory of a major earthquake that remains with Pavel Matustik is of avoiding the aftershocks by pulling his phone cord out the door of the building and setting up his “office” in the “beautiful California sunshine.” But the real positive memory was of how the extended community pulled together.

“Dairy companies were amazing, working nights to bring schools water and milk. By Day 3, the frozen food vendors came through, as well. Truck drivers spent extra hours getting to school sites and never asked for extra charges,” he recounts. A mere two days after the event, the school nutrition program was up and running to feed students and the community. “To see people work together like this was terrific. It’s one thing I love about America.”

In Meriden, Conn., Susan Maffe agrees, but believes there’s something extra special about those who work in and around school nutrition. “School foodservice is so different from any other business. People care more about



DIAL TONE

Staying connected when the power goes out—and stays out.

Joan Shorter, director of food and nutrition services, Prince George’s County (Md.) Public Schools, encountered a problem for which she has no answers. Whether a community is devastated by snowfall, floods, wind or fire, power outages are probably among the root causes of school closures and food storage crises. But they also can affect communications. No e-mail. No phone. Even cell service can be disrupted for a variety of reasons, including extremely high demand or simply because users are unable to keep their smartphones charged. During successive blizzards in 2009-10, “We were

unable to communicate with cafeteria managers,” recounts Shorter. While she had many experienced managers who took the initiative to find their way to school sites and take care of business without direction, it’s a hole in her emergency plans and procedures that makes her uneasy. What do other districts have in place? Share your best practices by sending an e-mail to snmagazine@schoolnutrition.org.

Patricia Fitzgerald and Cecily Walters are, respectively, editor and assistant editor of School Nutrition. **Ariane Corbett** is a freelance writer in Arlington, Va., and a former manager of nutrition advocacy at SNA. While all three authors have “weathered” the after-effects of several meteorological crises in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area in recent years, Corbett has two enduring links: Her eldest child was born in the middle of the North American Blizzard of 2009, and her second was born just hours before the 2011 Virginia Earthquake. Photography by **George Manga, iStockphoto, philipp_g, Creatas Images, Comstock, Brandon Laufenberg, BrandXPictures and jjunlimited.com.**

BONUS WEB CONTENT

This article represents just a fraction of the fascinating and informative reflections of the school nutrition operators who generously shared their experiences with *School Nutrition*. We invite readers to go online to read more accounts and gain more advice about dealing with disasters, including advice for talking to children in times of trauma. This exclusive content is available at www.schoolnutrition.org/snmagazinebonuscontest.

people than the dollar; I haven't seen that in any other segment I've worked in." She can't praise her own staff highly enough: "They have such a strong work ethic. I couldn't reach them on the phone, but they would already be there—and in many cases, they were checking on [me]."

When the Waldo Canyon Fire threatened thousands of residents in Colorado Springs, Colo., last June, the school nutrition team at Colorado Springs 11 was ready to spring into action. While their services were not needed by the Red Cross, their partnership with Hunger Free Colorado allowed them to expand their mobile Summer Food Service Program to aid entire families. "And as word spread of our ability to reach out to families, our numbers continued to grow," recounts Executive Chef Brian Axworthy. "Each one of our summer team members were thrilled with the prospect of helping those in need and acted accordingly. I couldn't be more proud of their dedication and community involvement."

Minot Foodservice Manager April Carlson gets the last word: "An awesome part of belonging to school nutrition is that everyone is always willing to help and share." **SN**

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