

Natural disasters keep Kan. lodging director busy

BY RHONDA MCCURRY
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WICHITA, Kan. — When weather-related disasters happen, there's a good chance Matt Rogers and Corporate Lodging Consultants will get a phone call.

As Corporate Lodging's director of rapid response, Rogers has worked with natural disasters from the Greensburg tornado to Hurricane Katrina. His job is to manage an increasing number of staff who arrange lodging for customers that respond to disaster situations.

Rogers said his rapid response division just wrapped up an abnormal winter season.

"It is a non-traditional job that requires assistance for things that don't happen on a regular basis," he said. "We responded to the recent tornadoes in Savannah (Ga.) and Atlanta and have been inundated with customers in Missouri due to flooding."

Rogers came on board with Corporate Lodging Consultants two months after Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana and Mississippi and helped develop the company's rapid response group to provide lodging for federal and state agencies, workers and volunteers.

"We assisted with hotel communications and housing for American Red Cross and FEMA," he said. "As a leading lodging provider, we already had a relationship that allowed us to provide those people with a warm, safe, clean place to stay."

As a former communications and marketing director for the Wichita Wranglers and news photographer at KAKE, Rogers said there was a learning curve to his current position. Communication experience and understanding the hotel industry are what he calls the key elements to success.

"You don't dive into the guts of a hotel business when you check in on vacation or for a business trip," he said. "In a job like mine, you don't have a lot of time to learn the lingo except that when those groups need hotel service again, we make it available."

Now, Rogers said he knows more about weather than he ever thought possible. He receives daily weather updates and alerts from multiple sources and closely monitors weather forecasts during nationwide events like the Super Bowl.

Being able to send and receive e-mails, phone calls, faxes and text messaging helps Corporate Lodging's rapid response staff efficiently manage disaster situations. Rogers said the company's reputation as a reliable lodging provider gives his staff immediate access when natural disaster strikes.

"We rely on hotel contacts and relationships with national chains to keep us in business," he said. "There's nothing that I don't do that my company hasn't already built and my workers don't build for me."

Hurricane Katrina has been the largest-scale disaster for Rogers, who saw volunteers and staff work 12 to 14 hours each day.

"There was not much to hold onto to be safe during Katrina, but a hotel room is where everyone is safe and gets a good night sleep. At least we can provide that."