

ANNOUNCER: You've tuned into another edition of The Break Room. A

weekly conversation about how the City of St Augustine

works from those who do the work everyday. Hosted by the

City of St Augustine's Communications Director, Melissa

Wissel. The Break Room offers a closer look at the different

city departments and provides updates on current and upcoming

projects and events. And now your host, Melissa Wissel.

MELISSA: Hello and thanks for tuning in to The Break Room. I'm Melissa

Wissel, Communications Director for the City of St

Augustine. Hurricane season started on June 1st and it's

been quiet so far. As a matter

of fact, as I understand it,

this is the first time since

1997 that we've had no named

storms in the month of August.

But with so many new residents

in the city and the county, I

wanted to invite St

Augustine Fire Chief Carlos

Aviles back to the studio for a

refresher course on being

prepared for a hurricane. Chief,

welcome back. CARLOS: Thank you so much

for having me. MELISSA: Don't quote me

on that statistic but I did

hear it this morning at the EOC

from the weather service guy.

CARLOS: Okay. I'm not sure. I'm sure

that you know. Probably pretty

accurate. It has been a below

average season. MELISSA: Yes, it has been so far. So far. Knocking on what

CARLOS: Correct. MELISSA: Okay. In an emergency situation, in this case, we're

talking hurricanes. You as the Fire Chief take over in the

city locally as our emergency manager. You kind of become the

guy in charge. John Regan, our City Manager kind of defers to

you and you oversee what's going on. Tell us a little bit

about your role in a hurricane, just to get us started today.

CARLOS: Yeah. So, you know, it's just another hat that I wear kind of

coordinating, or emergency response, as we as we prepare

for hurricane season. So, yeah,
the org chart looks a little

bit different under those
declared emergencies.

John Regan remains the CEO at
the top of the chain and then I

get elevated to basically COO
and take over operations and

working with various
departments in the city to

coordinate preparation, response,
recovery efforts. MELISSA: Right, all of

that. And we we locals, or those
of us who've been here for

years, we've been through,
we've talked about this. We had

Matthew Irma, Dorian, Michael
Hit over in the Panhandle. We

had down in the in Puerto Rico.
We, we've seen our fair share,

but we've had a lot of new
residents. CARLOS: We do. MELISSA: Lots of

people that are coming from the
North. We, I was thinking about

this. When we talk locally in
St Augustine about hurricane

preparedness. I think a lot of
people, not from here, would

think oh batteries, water,
canned food, be ready to hunker

down. We actually talk more
about evacuate, get to higher

ground. Because in the
city, we're really low. CARLOS: We're

very very low lying and the the
greatest threat that we face is

is from water. And that's
often times when we make

evacuation decisions, it's all

primarily based upon water

rising and an inability for you

to move in and out of an

area safely. And so, the the

need to be prepared for those

events. For us locally,

unfortunately, doesn't only

apply to hurricane season. You

know, we have unfortunately seen

flooding events as a result of

strong nor'easters, or king

tides, when we get into the

months of September and

October. MELISSA: And that's going to

happen again this year. So stay

tuned. Listen we do try to post

reminding folks in

advance when those high tides

are going to come in, like you

you talked about the King

Tides. We also, folks need to

know how to get out of here. We
have evacuation zones. Where do

we find that information? We
find that information on the

St Johns County Emergency
Operations Center website, the

county EOC website. They have a
tool, a zone locator. You type

in your address, and then the
system lets you know what

evacuation zone you are in, if
any. MELISSA: Right and the website is

SJCEmergencyManagement.com.
So, if you're looking and

searching. The other thing we
have on that website, I want to

point out to new residents as
well as residents that have

been here for a while, is we

have a great alerting tool

called AlertStJohns. CARLOS: Yes,

so you can go on and register

for that system, it would push out

emergency notifications. And you

know, now we always preach that

the best time to prepare is under

blue sky conditions, which would

be now. So whether you have been

here in town for a long time or

you're new a new resident to

the area, it is important that

you do know that information.

And it does change from time to

time. So this year specifically,

we did see evacuation zone

changes based on data and

flooding results from previous

storms that we have seen over

the past four or five years. And

so I can tell you now with

complete certainty, that if you

happen to live inside of the

city limits, anywhere in the

city limits of St Augustine,

you are in evacuation zone A.

MELISSA: You gotta get out. CARLOS: You, yes. If

you if you hear of a mandatory

evacuation for A and you know

that you live within the city

limits, then then you know that,

that does apply to you. MELISSA: An

evacuation, this is another one

that I learned. When someone

says to me, we need to evacuate.

I'm like oh my gosh, we gotta

get to Atlanta. We gotta go to

Tallahassee. No. CARLOS: No. The other side of the interstate. MELISSA: No. Get on the other side of ninety-five.

CARLOS: Yeah, basically, right? If you can, if you can move inland out

of one of those zones, you know, you're fine. And again,

primarily, that those evacuations are a result of

of impending. MELISSA: Water. CARLOS: Water, correct. MELISSA: Right. If you're just

now tuning in, you're listening to The Break Room. I'm Melissa

Wissel, Communications Director. And I am talking with

Fire Chief Carlos Aviles, in studio talking about some

hurricane reminders and preparedness. The city also

has an alert system, little bit different. I want to make sure

that folks know the difference.

So, you can text StAugAlerts to 888777. And that's going to give you a phone

notification of something that is life threatening, imminent

danger, if you sign up for that. But the difference with

the St Johns, Alert St Johns, is that you can actually

choose how you get notified.

CARLOS: Correct. Yep. It could be by

email, phone call, it'd be a robocall, or you could just

simply a text. MELISSA: And that's not also just for hurricanes. I, I'm

signed up for St Johns,
excuse me. Alert St Johns

and I get thunderstorm warnings are coming, or a boil water

notice is happening, so. CARLOS: Any

kind of information that we

feel needs to get out to the
public, you know, instantly but

but very targeted, so that's a
nice system. MELISSA: We also want to

make sure that folks are
following us on social media,

both the City and the Fire
Department. The Fire Department

is on Instagram and Facebook.
You're not really going to find

any emergency notices on any of
our Instagram platforms. We

want to keep those as feel good
pictures, things that we're

doing. But for those emergency
notifications, we talked before

about when we are going to see
those high tides, the City

tries to do its best to post
those reminders, so that if you

do live in those low-lying
areas, you remember that the

weather's coming, and that's on
Facebook both @CityStAug

and @CityStAugFire. And
of course, remind folks of that

when we wrap up. Before we sign
off though, we are here the

beginning of September and we
have September 11th coming up.

Which is a tough day,
but you guys do a beautiful

job. Tell us what we're
going to have this year. CARLOS: So, we

hold an annual Ceremony of
Remembrance every year at 8:30

at the fire station at 101
Malaga Street. Every year it

seems to have grown and we're
very grateful for that. The

fire department really took
that on years ago and I think

that's where the ceremony has
has found its home. So we get a

really great contingency of, you
know, retired FDNY and NYPD

officers that happen to to live
here in the area that come. But

it's a great opportunity for
the community to get together.

Share in a moment of
remembrance. You know, this

year we'll have the family
member of a victim that

perished during 9/11 deliver her
remarks, Erin Durkin. So she's

also the wife of Jerry Durkin

who spoke two years ago and is

a retired New York City

Firefighter. So I think it's,

I'm hoping, I can't wait to hear

her remarks... That the idea this

year is that we kind of shift

and and give a year to the

victims. And to let

them or the family members sort

of tell their story, as well. So

very excited about it. MELISSA: It'll be

very a very touching message

I'm sure. I can't imagine, as

as you and I talked about it.

It's one thing to know that

your family member is fighting

to respond, it's also another

thing, you know, to lose someone.

So, it's it's a tough call,. But

and thank you for that, because
you're always very sensitive to

the to those things. So to bring
it in to the family members, as

well. CARLOS: Yeah I think it's really...
I mean, I'm super excited about

it. I think giving them the
opportunity to have a voice and

hopefully the goal moving
forward is to establish this

network where we can find these
other family members and

connect with them in a way
where we can provide them the

opportunity if they want to
share that story, to be able to

do that. And I I think that's
the way that we we we keep... MELISSA:

Truly never forget. True.
That's kind of the the phrase

that comes out of that. It
really allows those family
members to continue to have
their family members living on.

CARLOS: Correct. MELISSA: That, you know, their
memory isn't forgotten and they

aren't forgotten. We, I think
we're good at that. CARLOS: Yes. MELISSA: So

anything else you want to add?

CARLOS: So, I will take just a couple
moments of of personal
privilege if I could.

MELISSA: Absolutely. CARLOS: I know that this
won't air today. Today is

September first. So, today is
actually my sixth year

anniversary serving as Fire
Chief. And, you know, time has

gone by so unbelievably fast.

And it was really a trial by
flood for me. You know Matthew
hit I think three weeks after I
had been in office. And so, in
fact my very first day as the
Fire Chief was spent at the EOC
for Hurricane Hermine which
hit in the Big Bend area. But,
you know, I've had the privilege
of serving the City of St
Augustine as Fire Chief, you
know, now for six years. And so,
just as a point of personal
privilege, that there are a few
folks that you know I wouldn't
be where I'm at without their
unbelievable help and support.

And you are certainly one of
those people, Melissa. MELISSA: Thank you. CARLOS: So I

mean I would be honored to
start with you. I mean, you were

right there with me, right seat
left seat, through everything,

and through all of these storms.

Linda Stoughten, Kelly Wilson, out

at the EOC. I have just
unbelievable amounts of, you

know, gratitude to them for the
work that they do. Our City

Manager John Regan and Meredith
Bridenstein for the faith and

trust that they've put in me.

Chris Pacetti, my right

hand at the Fire Department, and
everybody at the St

Augustine Fire Department. I
think the work that they do day

in and day out is just
absolutely amazing. I love

watching them do. MELISSA: You have a
you have a great team down

there. CARLOS: I do. Chief Prevatt
and retired Chief Carl Shank

from St Johns County Fire
Rescue and Sheriff Hardwick. I

mean, have all played a massive
role, not just in my success, but

in the community success and
ability to recover from these

disasters and we're very
blessed and to have such a

talented and dedicated group of
folks here. MELISSA: Thank

you. I am happy to
serve with you. I I remember

that day in the EOC. I actually
think I have a picture of you

and Chris sitting at the

ESF station. And

Hermine and thinking you're like,
well, that's a heck of a first

day. I think you and I
also to indulge our audience,
you and I stood in front of the engine
and did our very first ever video. CARLOS: We did. Yup. MELISSA: It
was, I mean, by today's standards

it would be horrible. But it was,
that was huge. CARLOS: Right. MELISSA: And

then that that also kicked off
the friendly competition with

you and the Police Department. CARLOS: No, it's awesome. I mean,

we're, like I said, we're very
blessed. It's been an amazing

ride. I I love what I do. It's
the best job ever. Looking

forward to doing it for a long
time to come, so, but, yeah.

No, I feel truly blessed. MELISSA: Well,
we thank you for your

service. You are an incredible
leader for our, for our

community. I'm always so
impressed when I come down to

the Fire Department. There's
just such a camaraderie.

Everyone loves being there.
I don't think you see that

everywhere, and you make a
difference to this

community. So, without me
getting all choked up and verklempt.. CARLOS: I

appreciate that. Thank you. MELISSA:
Well if you're, if you missed

any part of this episode we've
been talking about hurricanes.

We've been talking about the
9/11 ceremony. Lots of good

stuff. You can tune back in.

You can find us on favorite

podcast. We're on Spotify,

Apple, Spreaker. Find any of

those podcast platforms listed

on our website at CityStAugRadio. com. Of course, all

year round and especially

during hurricane season, we

want to keep you informed about

what's happening. Follow the

Fire Department on Facebook and

Instagram @CityStAugFire. You can follow the City

@CityStAug. Until next

time. Thanks for tuning in.

ANNOUNCER: You've been listening to The

Break Room, a weekly program

addressing projects and

programs offered by the City of

St Augustine. Join us each

week as the City's

Communications Director,

Melissa Wissel, has in-depth

conversations with the people

who make our town work to meet

the needs of our community. The

Break Room is produced by

Communication Specialist for

the City of St Augustine,

Cindy Walker. See you at this

time next week for another

edition of The Break Room.