

Hurricane Milton

Near-record flooding



LUIS SANTANA | Times

Residents ride in a boat in a neighborhood inundated by historic flooding of the Alafia River in the wake of Hurricane Milton on Friday in Lithia.

- Milton pushes Alafia River to highest-recorded flooding in Lithia since 1933.
- Deputies in boats were going door to door to rescue stranded residents.

BY CHRISTOPHER O'DONNELL
Times Staff Writer

LITHIA — After 23 years living close to the Alafia River, Valrico residents Bob and Shirley Haynes know well enough to keep a watchful eye out for flooding after a powerful storm.

But Hurricane Milton left them without power and internet for almost two days. The last online flood advisory they had seen had the river rising to 19 feet, not high enough to reach their backyard.

Something told them to go out-

side and check around 8:30 p.m. Thursday.

"We walked into the backyard — realized the river was coming," said Bob Haynes, 82. "We grabbed stuff and had to go."

The couple evacuated to the home of their son, Ron Haynes, but had to return Friday morning when their son waded through waist-high water to retrieve his father's diabetes medication.

Two days after the devastating wind and rain of Hurricane Milton, storm-weary residents along the Alafia River in Lithia and Val-

rico awoke to another gut punch: near-record flooding that prompted a dawn rescue by the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office.

Across Tampa Bay, residents were still living in the fallout of the aftermath of the storm. Rivers flooded across Pasco County. Thousands were still without power, and reckoned with knowing it may not come on before next week. Many more were removing debris from their homes and yards — adding to the existing piles still on the curb from Hurricane Helene just weeks before.

By Friday afternoon, the Alafia had risen 23 feet — 4 feet higher than what's designated as major flooding, and the highest recorded mark since 1933, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The flooding follows torrential downpours from Milton in places like Polk County that feed into the headwaters of the Alafia. The river could still rise another foot higher, which may mean additional rescues, said Hillsborough County Sheriff Chad Chronister.

Using boats and specialist amphibious vehicles, deputies went door to door through flooded neighborhoods. Dozens of residents stranded by floodwaters that rose chest high were given rides to dry land. Others, whose homes are elevated or who have their own canoes and boats, chose to stay put.

Although Lithia residents are used to flooding, they may not have been ready for how much water was headed their way this time, Chronister said.

See ALAFIA, 3A

DeSantis says St. Petersburg crane developer should've used more 'common sense'

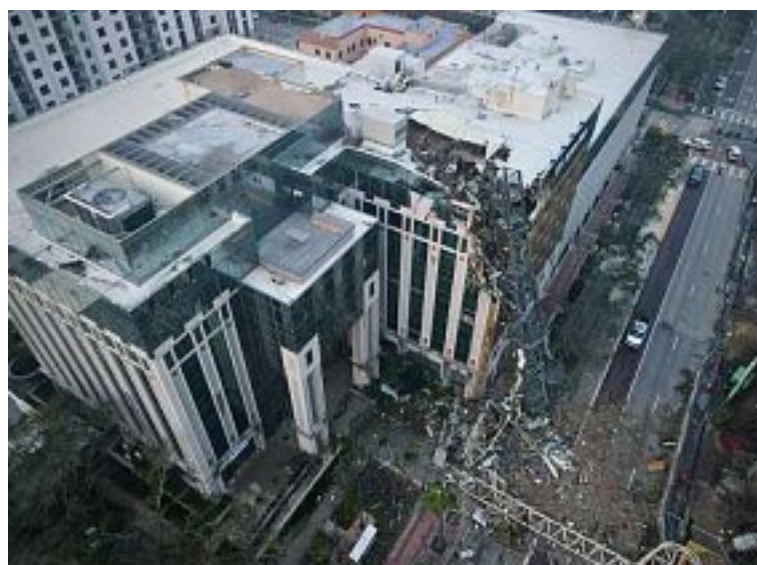
The severely damaged building houses multiple businesses, including the Times.

BY EMILY L. MAHONEY
AND ROMY ELLENBOGEN
Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

ST. PETERSBURG — Standing in front of the crumpled wreckage of a downtown high-rise smashed by a fallen crane, Gov. Ron DeSantis said the developer responsible should have used more "common sense" to take down heavy equipment before Hurricane Milton arrived.

He made the remarks following a news conference in which state officials provided updates about Milton recovery. A reporter asked whether there should be more government regulation of cranes during extreme weather.

"I mean, do we have to regulate everything?" DeSantis said, add-



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ing that he thought taking cranes down during storms was "standard practice."

"Do you really have to really, See DESANTIS, 2A

A crane that fell over during Hurricane Milton and hit an office building housing the Tampa Bay Times headquarters is pictured Thursday.

Milton's Cat. 3 winds caused nearly triple the outages of Helene

Hundreds of thousands in the Tampa Bay area are still without power.

BY TEGHAN SIMONTON
Times Staff Writer

More than 924,000 Tampa Bay customers were still without power as of Friday afternoon, as utility providers tackled downed trees, flooded equipment and rows of poles brought down by Hurricane Milton's Category 3 winds.

"This storm packed enough of a punch to knock out power to more than a million customers," said Ana Gibbs, a spokesperson for Duke Energy.

Gibbs said that hundreds of damage assessors were deployed throughout the state Thursday to evaluate the storm's impacts, barely two weeks after Hurricane Helene pummeled the region with record storm surge.

Helene knocked out power for

more than 1.3 million customers. But Milton nearly tripled that, causing more than 3.4 million outages statewide, according to data from poweroutages.us.

"In this case, Hurricane Milton traversed the most populated areas we serve in both Tampa Bay and the Orlando Metro area," Gibbs said. "The combination of the intensity of the storm and the higher population density made this a different response."

Most of Milton's damage was caused by wind — meaning disturbances to power lines from debris and uprooted trees. That's a departure from two weeks ago, when Helene's storm surge flooded utility equipment and made it harder for providers to assess damage. Transformers were swept away by the storm surge, Gibbs said.

Tampa Electric also had exponentially more outages during and after Milton. Nearly See OUTAGES, 2A