

FDOT DISTRICT TWO

Intelligent Transportation Systems Newsletter –
February 2012



A crash on the Buckman Southbound during afternoon drive on 2/13 meant a long way/wait home!

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ITS Announcements

First Coast TIM Meeting D2 Urban Office 03/20/2012 10am

Please contact the ITS Office at (904) 360-5465 if you would like to participate in the meetings.

Notes from the District 2 ITS Engineer

As mentioned in last month's newsletter the TMC staff participated in a WebEOC training and configuration session in January. The purpose of WebEOC is to tie all regional and state incident responders together so that a more cohesive approach can be taken when dealing with major events. Captain Gaston recently provided a link to several studies associated with WebEOC and how it's being used throughout the country. The link to this information is provided so that you can take a look at some of the uses: (http://www.esi911.com/esi/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&Itemid=115&gid=33&orderby=dmdate_published&ascdesc=DESC). Several major events are addressed in these studies, thus displaying many of the possible uses by our TIM team members.

The key element is that FHP has taken the lead to make this a statewide effort, thus providing us with the opportunity to get advanced notification about events several hours away. An example would be a wildfire event in Central or South Florida. With WebEOC the Jacksonville TMC would be able to acquire real-time information on lane or road closures and then could advise motorists well in advance so that an alternative route could be chosen. The key difference from today's approach is that we currently have to telephone various agencies in other parts of the state to acquire this info, thus leading to an unproductive process. Time and effort is lost with the current method, however

with the new approach this information will be in hand immediately after input into various Computer Aided Dispatch systems around Florida.

Locally, the biggest challenge has been when multiple agencies are associated with an event. Everyone has their tasks and responsibilities to deal with during this incident, thus the last thing on their mind is to update partners on their most updated plan or situation. When this occurs there is a disjointed approach to dealing with the issue in the most effective manner possible, thereby leading to longer than desired lane and road closures. By putting all this information into one conduit we can coordinate more efficiently and thereby reduce effort and manpower. Likewise, we can use WebEOC's whiteboard capabilities when alternate detour routes need to be developed due to unforeseen conflicts.

WebEOC is not new to the industry and Florida will benefit from the experiences of others. Our goal is to take these lessons learned and make it better to fulfill our needs. We have been extremely fortunate that there has been a lull in hurricane alerts over the past few years but we should not get complacent with this good fortune. Properly configuring this region's WebEOC will allow us to keep all our partners on the same page, from the District/Local EOCs to Law Enforcement to Fire/Rescue to the Local Shelters. Also, the Department will be able to coordinate more

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Notes from the District 2 ITS Engineer cont.

effectively with its limited manpower to get the personnel in the right place when needed. The “good old days” of being stretched thin by going from point A to B to C can be averted so that Department staff can be at particular locations when needed.

As mentioned previously, the cost of this tool was minimal due to a Grant obtained by local partners. There will be a small annual cost to deal with the maintenance and updating of hardware/software but it will be well worth it once the system is configured. FHP has taken the lead in providing the network and software personnel that can manage the system and the Department will provide help from its TMC Network Administrator. Recently, the City of Jacksonville ceded control of the Fusion server to FHP, thus their participation will increase with this move.

This is the one project where I have held back my normal optimism and have told our staff that this will be a two-year journey. There will be immediate benefits once the system is fully operational but it will take time for team members to become accustomed to the new system and its daily usage. Each partner will have to work with us to develop the proper coding so that their software/network can feed information into WebEOC. Likewise, there will need to be extensive training for all our partners so that everyone understands what information is being

placed into WebEOC. Finally, once a major event occurs I am certain that there will be lessons learned and all will not go smoothly. A good example would be the white boarding feature and what can or cannot be done with the tool.

I feel we will get a good gauge on WebEOC by the end of this year’s hurricane season. I am sure we will get lots of practice whether the northeast Florida region is threatened or not, thereby leading to improvements in the future. Once the network geniuses get their hands on this tool I feel “the sky’s the limit” as far as how we can utilize its features. The biggest concern is how we can develop it for those key personnel that will be using it on a daily basis. So, until next Fall.....keep your fingers crossed.

Pete Vega
District 2 ITS Engineer



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Maintenance

Replacement of the CCTV cameras, Microwave Vehicle Detectors, Video Encoders, and Switches has begun on I-95 between I-10 and the Southern I-95/I-295 Interchange. As we noted in the last newsletter, the Northern portion of the ITS System had these devices replaced in recent months and since then has seen very few maintenance issues. It is anticipated that all of the work to replace these devices will be completed by the end of March. Once these replacements are completed, we anticipate seeing very few maintenance issues on the system, other than lightning strikes and periodic failures.

There are still several wind sensors remaining to be installed on bridges around Jacksonville. The ITS Maintenance Contractor has visited several of the bridges and has purchased the materials required to install the wind sensors on these bridges. Coordination is currently taking place to have police, Road Rangers, and Maintenance of Traffic available to the ITS Maintenance Contractor, as several of the remaining bridges will require lane closures to install the wind sensors. More information will be provided in upcoming Newsletters as these sites are installed and data is being collected.

The ITS Maintenance Contractor has continued to install the BlueTooth travel time readers. These devices were installed on US 17 and the northern I-95 section of the ITS system. FDOT and consultant personnel are working with the

manufacturer to get all of the installed devices online. These devices not only provide travel time information, they also provide Origin/Destination information, which is used by FDOT planners to project needs for Roadway Improvements on future projects. When all installations are complete in and around Jacksonville, there will be almost two hundred devices installed. This project is the largest deployment of these BlueTooth readers and will enable Traffic Operations and Planning personnel to receive data that they were previously unable to obtain. This data will be used for daily Traffic Management Center Operations as well as planning and reporting.

Finally, the ITS Maintenance storage room is getting a face lift. The storage room contains all of the spare parts that the ITS Maintenance Group needs to keep the ITS System functioning properly. This month FDOT and consultant personnel went through the entire inventory and came up with a shelving design to better organize the materials. The shelving, a workbench, and rolling tool boxes are currently on order and are anticipated to be received in early March. It will take several days to put everything together and get the materials stocked on the shelves, but in the end it will create a neater and more organized storage area.

Kevin Jackson
ITS Field Specialist

Construction

Construction activities on the Phase 7 Project, on SR 9A from I-95 going south to Atlantic Blvd, have not increased since the last Newsletter. During the month of February, the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent took positions with other Companies and the Contractor recently hired a new Superintendent for the Project. Material submittals for the bridge conduit and aerial junction boxes were received this month. One of the most time consuming portions of this project is the installation of conduit across the Northbound side of the Dames Point Bridge. Having the bridge conduit materials on site and a subcontractor available to install the bridge conduit would be seen as a large step in getting the project back on track. The completion of this project is greatly anticipated, as it will provide ITS in the area on SR 9A around JaxPort as well as Heckscher Drive.

The Contractor for the Phase 8 Project, on I-295 from I-95 South to I-10, is continuing to make progress on items throughout the project corridor. Installation of conduit, pull boxes, MVDS device poles, and power services is still underway. The Contractor is still awaiting the approval of the spun concrete poles, so that they can order them and get them on site. The Dynamic Message Signs were delivered to the site on February 10th. Pre-Installation testing of the DMS was conducted on February 21st with few issues discovered. The Pre-Installation testing is performed to insure that no damage was done to the signs during transport

from the manufacturer. The Contractor has used approximately 52% of the allowable Contract Time and continues to stay on schedule for an on-time completion. This project will complete the installation of ITS on the I-295 Western Beltway and will allow Traffic Management Center Operators to monitor the area to assist with incident detection, Traffic Incident Management, and will allow them to post Traveler Information to motorists along the corridor.

The Phillips Highway (US 1) Project, on US1 from Greenland Road North to Wishart Road, continues to progress. The Contractor has submitted approximately 95 percent of their material cutsheets for the project and is currently installing conduit throughout the project. The Arterial Dynamic Sign structures are anticipated to be delivered in April and will be installed soon after receipt. This project is installing ITS devices, but is also installing devices for the Signal System. Completion of the project will allow City of Jacksonville Traffic and TMC personnel to observe traffic along the corridor and dynamically change signal timings to alleviate areas of congestion. This is the first of many projects around Jacksonville that will allow FDOT and City personnel to direct motorists between Interstate and Arterial roadways depending on the amount of congestion on the Roadways.

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Construction continued

The SR 200 Project, which is installing CCTVs along SR 200 to the East of the Intracoastal Waterway, began construction on January 23rd. The contract duration for this project is 75 days. The contractor is currently in the submittal process and has started mobilizing their equipment to the Project area.

The College Drive Project is scheduled to begin Construction on March 4th. The Contractor is currently in a 60 day Acquisition Period to allow them time to submit material cut sheets for approval on the items they plan to use on the Project. This Project will install fiber optic cable along College Drive, a small section of CR 220 and Sleepy Hollow Road to provide a communications link from the Clay County Traffic Operations Center to Blanding Blvd.

John Kell
District 2 ITS Construction Project Manager

RISC – RAPID INCIDENT SCENE CLEARANCE – UPDATE

February 15th started off with a bang – two to be exact – as we had not one, but TWO RISC incidents within minutes of each other. The first incident happened at 12:18 AM on I-95 NB between Duval Road/I-295 and was handled by Southern Wrecker. A semi truck overturned and took over 2 hours to upright and remove. The 2nd

incident occurred at 12:32 AM on I-95 SB at Lem Turner and was handled by Walt’s Wrecker. This incident was cleared within the RISC timeline. We will have the debrief meetings for these incidents at our First Coast Traffic Incident Management Team Meeting on March 20th.

We are fortunate to have our RISC Contractors to assist with the quick clearance of our interstates. A special thanks to Walt’s and Southern Wrecker Services!

Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Update

FIRST COAST TIM TEAM UPDATE

First Coast Traffic Incident Management Team will hold its next meeting on March 20th at 10:00 AM in the FDOT Training Center at 2198 Edison Avenue. Gracie Kennedy and Jennifer Parris with FDEP will be conducting a training session on environmental cleanup procedures. Immediately following this meeting we will conduct the Rapid Incident Scene Clearance (RISC) Debrief Meetings for our last two RISC Incidents on February 15th.

ALACHUA TIM TEAM UPDATE

The Alachua Traffic Management Team met on February 8th at the FDOT Operations Office, 5301 NE 39th Avenue, Gainesville, FL. The following agencies were represented: Alachua Sheriff’s

Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Update cont.

ALACHUA TIM TEAM UPDATE

Office, FDOT Public Information Office, University Towing, Metric Engineering, Florida Highway Patrol, City of Gainesville, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, FDOT Maintenance, Total Traffic, Atkins Engineering, City of Gainesville Fire Department, FDOT Environmental Coordinator, Gainesville Police, Alachua County Sheriff's Office, SmartRoute Systems and FDOT ITS.

All traffic incidents were debriefed but special attention and discussion was given to the crashes occurring on I-75 on January 29th. Incident responders explained the obstacles they faced while responding and it was apparent all responders worked as a Team and had great respect for each other. A moment of silence was observed to honor motorists involved as well as responders.

Volume 4 – February 2012 - of the *Alachua TIM Newsletter* has been sent to all members. All editions of this newsletter can be found on our website: jax511.com. This is a great source to stay informed to what is happening in this area of our state.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR ALACHUA TEAM MEMBERS!

District 2 TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM MISSION:

The Florida Department of Transportation District Two's Traffic Incident Management Teams through partnering efforts strive to continuously reduce incident scene clearance times to deter Congestion and improve safety. The Teams' objective is to exceed the Open Roads Policy thus ensuring mobility, economic prosperity, and quality of life.

District 2 TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM VISION:

Through cooperation, communication and training the Teams intend to reduce incident scene clearance times by 10% each year through 2015.



North Florida TPO Update

There has been minimal change in the NFTPO projects since the month of January. Contractors are beginning to purchase materials for the College Drive and State Road 200 projects. The Arterial Dynamic Message Sign project is under review and should be Let in April. The designs for the Airport and Jaxport are underway with no concerns about making the proposed schedule. The only setback encountered has been with the Philips Highway job and a sub-contractor that feels a good days work amounts to about three hours. We are dealing with that as will be addressed in the construction section.

Our maintenance contractor continues to plug away at the Bluetooth and Wind Sensor deployments throughout the northeast region. The biggest challenge has been trying to tie all the local agency networks together to have one homogenous system. I anticipate that by the end of this month our consultants should have a solution figured out. The key focus is on how we will tie St. Johns County, the Beaches and Nassau County into the ITS network. New equipment has been ordered that may help us with significantly reduced costs and better performance. Thanks to our Gainesville MPO team for providing this bit of insight during the month of January.

The big project that we all have been looking forward to is the new Regional Transportation Management Center that will be built on State

property at the Davis Street complex. On the afternoon of February 10th the Department of Management Service's (DMS) construction division scheduled a teleconference between the agencies Attorneys. The objective was to hash out any legal concerns so that this project could progress as scheduled. After about 30 minutes it seemed like the light bulb clicked on and both sets of Attorneys began speaking the same language.

Their goal is to resolve any legal issues by the end of February so that DMS can advertise for an Architect by mid-March. Our team gave them a timeline of no later than early June to have a contract in place, thereby avoiding any possibility that these funds will roll forward to fiscal year 2013. Once the Architect is in place and 30% plans are developed DMS can advertise for a Construction Management at Risk firm. If everything works out as planned then construction could begin by December 2012 (if not sooner). The project manager for DMS anticipates that this will be a 360 day construction project that may get done faster if the size of existing utilities can accommodate a 20,000 square foot facility.

So, what does this mean for us? It means a ton of work over the next two years as we try to get the new facility completed by the beginning of 2014. The first task at hand is to revisit the memorandum of understanding agreements we developed as partners in 2006.

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North Florida TPO Update continued

A lot has changed over the last six years so these documents need to be revisited, reviewed and approved by upper management in the coming months. Once these are signed we will have a better understanding on the operational approach for the new RTMC. Currently, the plan is to have TMC staff, FHP JRCC personnel, City of Jax Traffic Signals operators, JSO dispatchers and JFRD employees on the TMC floor. Interconnectivity to Jaxport operations, JTA dispatch/security, JIA, Jax EOC and partnering counties will also be addressed during construction. Hence, this is where WebEOC will become so important for the outlying partners.



Road Ranger Update

Proving their importance to the Traffic Incident Program, the Road Ranger Operators performed 2491 motorist assists in the first month of Year 2012. All of the District 2 Road Ranger Operators understand our mission and strive daily to “continuously reduce incident scene clearance times to deter congestion and improve safety.” Letters and phone calls received show that all of the assistance given is done so in a professional and caring manner.

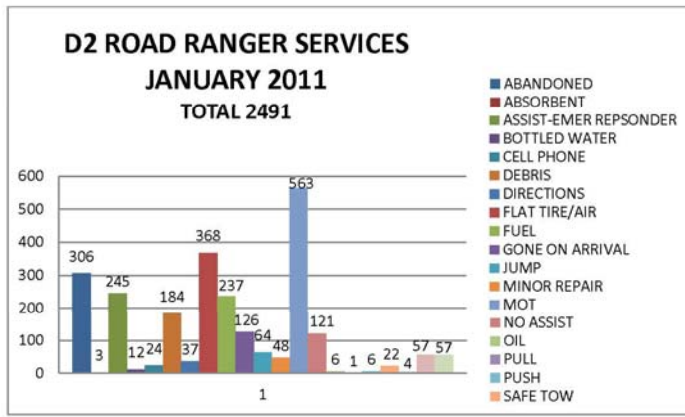
The Road Ranger Program is able to remain in full operation due to the assistance of our Road Ranger Sponsor, *Jax Legal. Com*. Attorneys Hardesty, Tyde, Green and Ashton believe in the Road Ranger Program and with their financial assistance the Road Rangers continue to provide safety to motorists as well as our incident responders.



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Road Ranger Update continued

The Department remains open to acquiring other interested supporters so hopefully new sponsors will be announced in the near future.



Don't forget to complete the online "Annual Statewide Road Ranger Survey for Incident Responders". The deadline to complete this form is March 5, 2012. The goal of this survey is to get input from Incident Responders on the Road Ranger Program from their perspective. This data will be used for program improvements and to determine needed enhancements.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/roadrangersurvey>

There have been some slight modifications to the Survey this year in hopes it will help streamline the data processing and allow us to provide the Districts with their detailed information for internal program analysis. Please take a few minutes to support our Road Ranger Service Patrol.

If you prefer a hard copy version of the survey please contact me at donna.danson@dot.state.fl.us. The hard copy completed surveys should be mailed to:

Florida DOT
 Attn: Patrick Odom
 605 Suwannee Street, MS 90
 Tallahassee, FL 32399-0450

If you have any comments or questions please feel free to contact me at (904) 360-5635 or Paul Clark at (850) 410-5607 - paul.clark@dot.state.fl.us

Donna Danson
 District 2
 ITS Operations Project Manager

Performance Measures

A couple new features were added to the SunGuide performance measures reports this month. The weekly performance measures report now includes a column showing the 52-week average as shown below. At a glance each week can be compared to a reliable average. With the chart showing this comparison, it will be easy to highlight how the current and previous weeks varied from the norm.

It will be a valuable tool in measuring the performance of incident management on a weekly level. Notice that with this chart one can quickly see that the current and previous weeks averaged shorter incident duration times than the year, although there were more events in those weeks than in the typical week. In this chart, the current week is the week ending February 18.

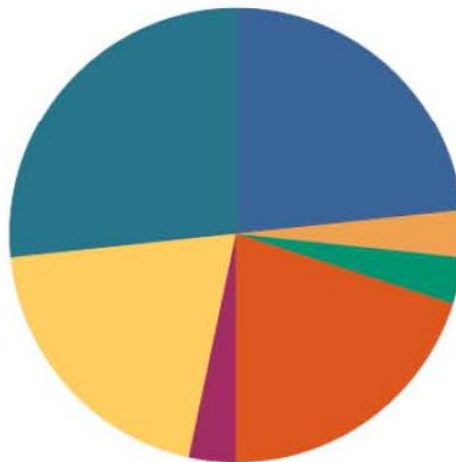
	52-Week Average	Current Week	Previous Week
Events included in Performance Measures	43	62	46
A. Notification Duration (min.)*	0.1	0.0	0.0
B. Verification Duration (min.)	0.4	0.0	0.0
C. Response Duration (min.)	8.3	7.6	8.1
D. Open Roads Duration (min.)	39.3	42.1	39.2
E. Departure Duration (min.)	28.5	23.8	24.1
Roadway Clearance Duration (min.)	48.1	49.7	47.3
Incident Clearance Duration (min.)	76.6	73.5	71.4

Performance Measures continued

Additionally, the performance measures report now includes a chart showing activities performed by the Road Rangers. Notice from the chart that the main activities they perform are vehicle message board (VMB), MOT, deploy cones and assist law enforcement. This shows that Road Rangers are principally helping with incident management. Evidence of the value of this is in the performance measures data. For

2012, events without Road Ranger response took an average of nearly 1.5 hours to clear. However, events with Road Rangers response took just over an hour to clear and the roadway was open in less than 45 minutes. Clearing the roadway quicker saves time for travelers and makes the road safer for everyone. This further proves the safety benefit of the Road Ranger service.

Jill Dawson
Metric Engineering



Assist Law Enf	23.3%
Assist Maintenance	3.3%
Assist Wrecker	3.3%
Deploy Cones	20.0%
Event Info	3.3%
MOT non-specific	20.0%
VMB	26.7%
Total:	100.0%

Marketing

And we're off! Every spring, it feels kind of like we've been shot out of a cannon. There are so many amazing festivals in and around Northeast Florida, and we're privileged to be able to take part in so many of them! From azaleas to shrimp, our region celebrates the natural wonders that help put us on the map and in many cases even fuel our economy. Factor in a few pirates here and there, and you've got a winning combination... beauty, food AND entertainment! With the pirates, I'm referring to the later part of that equation, of course.

Just a couple of weekends ago, we took part in the 26.2 with Donna Marathon to Help Finish Breast Cancer, and what a successful event it was! We personally spoke to almost 1,400 people at our 511 booth alone. I had several people email me after the event saying they had already downloaded our free 511 Traffic App at the iTunes Store, and that they absolutely loved it! Any time we attend one of these events, we're always amazed at the positive responses we get. We have people standing in line, telling us they found out about us from their brother or their mother or their sister, and they, too, had to come over and see what all the fuss was about. (I have a sneaking suspicion they're really coming to see our prize wheel and not so much us, but that's okay, too). Word of mouth is one of the best tools we have in marketing the 511 service, so keep spreading the word to your cousins and neighbors and co-workers. Because we know this... when the motorists are happy, we're happy!

Next month, we'll get a chance to connect with even *more* motorists at several key events: the Putnam County Azalea Festival in downtown Palatka (3/3 and 3/4), the Gate River Run at the Jacksonville Fairgrounds (3/8-3/10) and the St. Augustine Seafood Festival at Francis Field in St. Augustine (3/17 and 3/18). Come join us!

When March is over, we breathe a sigh of relief. But not long, because then we turn our attention to the Bishop Kenny High School Health Fair and the Isle of 8 Flags Shrimp Fest. What did I tell you? It's that whole being shot out of a cannon experience. Spring always proves to be a busy time for our 511 Marketing Team, and I can't say enough about the handful of team members who willingly sacrifice their weekends to help make these events so successful! Thank you! Perhaps we'll get to catch our collective breath on the other side. Oh wait. What's that? Hurricane Season is just around the corner. I'll pretend I didn't hear that. Ssshhhhh.

As always, we welcome your comments, thoughts and suggestions. Remember, know before you go! Log onto www.FL511.com or dial 5-1-1 before heading out the door. Also, download our free 511 Traffic App today. It's available for use with iPhone, iPad or iPod devices. Simply go to the iTunes store and search "Florida 511." And Keep Moving!

Sherri Byrd
511 Marketing Manager

Operations

January 29th was the beginning of a 48 hour period where tragedy struck and heroes rose from the smoke and fog in Alachua County. When dealing with Mother Nature the best one can do is go with the facts that are in front of you. We have all been trained to assess the situation and make the best decision on the information that is available. Even when these best practices are used Mother Nature can change her mind at any minute and conditions may change.

That was the case that Saturday night. To no one's fault, Mother Nature shifted gears and an unavoidable crash occurred.

What happened was a tragedy, but what occurred after the fact was a display of team work, training, courage, bravery and hard work. The way all those Incident Responders thrust themselves into the situation, risking their own safety to secure the roadway and protect the traveling public was commendable. Resources were shared and deployed through various agencies, roles were expanded, sleep was not an option and team work kept this tragedy contained to the initial crashes.

Fingers weren't pointed and team work inspired these brave men and women to reduce secondary crashes and keep traffic moving as well as the arterial roadways would allow. With numerous fires in the area the job that was done was extraordinary. Personnel and resources were

shared on the city, county, district and statewide level. To all of those who had a hand in the Alachua County response, thank you. To the friends and family of those who lost a loved one our thoughts are with you.

January kicked off a busy start to the year with over 3,100 events. Of those events, 420 had some sort of lane blockage. The Road Rangers were busy during a chilly month assisting with Incident Management on over 2,000 events. The two most frequent activities the Road Rangers performed on site continue to be the use of their Vehicle Message Board and the changing of a flat tire.

Without ITS devices outside of Jacksonville (and parts of Jacksonville) the TMC depends on FDOT and FHP personnel to give us traffic information reports. You can reach our 24/7 line at (904)359-6842 or our work day line at (904)360-5465. You can now also leave feedback on the Next Generation 511 system about road conditions and bugs you may find in the system that is relayed to our operators in real time. Remember the story above and...

“Know Before You Go! Dial 511”

Ryan Crist
TMC Lead Supervisor

A DAY IN THE LIFE...Michael Harper TMC Operator

'Hey Michael, this is Brian Coats, how are you doing?'

On the other end of the line, a wave of nervousness crashed over me. I was starting my 3rd year at the University of North Texas, and hadn't spoken with Brian since my senior year of high school. Brian was my youth minister from 6th - 12th grade; my mom often relied on him to talk with me about important things, so a call from him often invoked the thought of a crackling school intercom pleading for my presence in the principal's office. I told him I had been doing well, and that I hadn't expected a phone call from him but was glad to hear from him, what could I do for him?

'Well, Michael, my church is looking for youth ministry interns to help lead our summer programming for junior high and high school youth. They asked if I had anyone in mind, and you were the first one who came to mind.'

Um, thanks? I would only be 3 years removed from high school the summer of 2010 and he wanted me to lead and guide a group of teenagers through their fits of teenage angst? Um, No, thanks?

He told me how great it would be: 2 mission trips, weekly bible studies, monthly outings to Astros' games or museums, and one week of camp

where you'll serve as a counselor. I have to admit, the monthly Astros' games sounded nice, and I always enjoyed mission work, so where would we be going? Brazil and Del Rio Texas.

Sign me up.

Brazil. Beautiful landscapes, vibrant culture, beautifully vibrant people. Brazil.

I couldn't wait. But as the date crept closer, that same nauseating nervousness returned to me. How would I answer the youth's questions about the greater meaning of life? I hadn't even figured it out for myself. What if I embarrassed Brian by being wholly inept at counseling and leading youth?? Oh well, at least I get to go to Brazil.

After arriving at the airport, I soon realized this would be different than any trip I had been on before. I also quickly realized how annoying I had been as a teenager. Being the male chaperone closest in age to the youth makes you the automatic 'cool' guy and the target for every question their minds could conjure.

'So, who would win in a fight; HHH riding King Kong or the Stone Cold Steve Austin hang-gliding on a Pterodactyl?' WHAT?!?!?!? And here I was worrying about answering questions about the infinite knowledge of an omnipotent higher being.

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A DAY IN THE LIFE... continued Michael Harper TMC Operator

'HHH. King Kong would knock the Pterodactyl out of the sky before Stone Cold could even realize HHH was on the monkey's back.'

The flight to Brazil was one of the most excruciating experiences of my life. The longest I had ever been on a plane was 3 hours from Houston to Washington D.C., so 18 hours in a pressurized cabin with little more than Orson Scott Card to entertain me felt like an eternity. After waking from my umpteenth restless nap, I welcomed the sunlight creeping in through my window. The sun was rising outside and I could see the light falling upon some of the most beautiful terrain in the world. A dense canopy stretched below our plane as far as the eye could see. The shoreline created a sharp contrast between the dark green foliage and the cool blue ocean lazily lapped upon the Brazilian coast. Paradise does exist.

We descended into Sao Paulo airport, and after being held for an hour in our plane on the tarmac, we were whisked through customs and on our way to our host church where we would be staying for our week in Sao Paulo. Near the airport, rainforests stretched along the right side of the road as the highway twisted its way along the mountainside down into the city. As we turned into the final bend away from the airport, you could see that Dallas and Houston were nothing but small blips on the map compared to Sao Paulo. The city stretched out

beyond the curve of the horizon, and in front of our eyes were rolling hills covered with makeshift housing that you wouldn't fathom people could live in. Yet, everyone our bus passed had the most brilliant smile on their face. You soon recognized that Sao Paulo, the third largest city in the world, wasn't the most luxurious city in the world, yet despite the shortcomings in the amenities department, people loved their home.

As we turned down one narrow street after another, often contemplating whether sitting next to the window on the bus was the wisest choice; we finally pulled in front of our destination, which had the distinct resemblance of Mardi Gras in June. Our hosts had put together a celebration for our arrival. How exciting! I soon realized it was not due to our arrival that the city was celebrating, but that day was Brazil's first match of the 2010 World Cup. Brazil faced North Korea in their first round robin match, and while no one expected anything less than a blowout, they were happy to ride the wave of hope that the World Cup instilled in the country. Before we knew it, we were swallowed by enthusiasm surging within the building. Cheers and chants were taught to everyone to help boost Brazil's chance at their first goal. Brazilian youth were teaching our youth how to Samba to little avail, learning that most American high schoolers seem to possess two left feet. The greatest part of the party was the food. They had laid out a spread

A DAY IN THE LIFE... continued Michael Harper TMC Operator

of the freshest pineapple, bananas, apples, oranges; all alongside the most vibrant salad topped with tomatoes, onions, cilantro, and eggs. My nose led me up the back stairs to the outdoors to find the men making churrasco, which roughly translated from Portuguese means barbeque. Soon the tables were covered in kebabs of pork, beef, and chicken and smelled better than any American churrascaria. I was enthused to find out we would be treated to these succulent meats almost every night of our stay.

The next week was a flurry of sweat, love, joy, and exhaustion. We visited a school one day, and were shocked at the state of the facilities. Small classrooms, chock full of desks, some with bare dirt floors, others with just enough dirt on the floor that you couldn't tell if it was concrete or not. The staff was extremely excited to show us their new computer room. Expecting a computer room circa 1993, we entered an immaculately clean room with the latest Dell computers, projectors, and Bluetooth capable whiteboards. It was exciting to see technology spread across the globe, and the pride they took in their new computers would only pale in comparison to the pride they have in their national soccer team. Soon we were taken to a large assembly room to perform some skits and puppet shows for the children. None of the children were impressed. They laughed at the silly puppets and choreographed songs, but they were more excited

to be out of class than actually seeing a show. Yet, when the children were asked to sing a song for us, a children's song about Lazarus, they all quieted down and sang with the common sense of community I was beginning to see within all Brazilians. This sense of family and responsibility towards others invigorated me and helped me realize that true brotherly love still existed in the world, and was flourishing in areas that weren't overwhelmed by mass media, corporate marketing plans, or centralized supermarkets. Brazilians weren't distracted by the latest and greatest in materialism that the world had to offer, but instead were united by the love of their fellow man.

After a long week of servitude in Sao Paolo, punctuated by the serving of a traditional Brazilian dish known as Feijoada, a delicious stew of cabbage, beans, pork, and rice, we thanked our hosts and departed for a few days of relaxation in Rio de Janeiro. The bus ride through the mountains was no more enjoyable than the plane ride, but our destination on Copa Cabana was well worth it. Our room overlooked the bay and we could see along the entire coast, including the large outdoor amphitheatre set up on the beach for all of Rio to come watch the World Cup.

We made our obligatory stop at El Redentor, the 3rd largest Christ statue in the world. We loaded into

A DAY IN THE LIFE... continued
Michael Harper TMC Operator

small Geo Metro taxis which whisked us up the mountain, during which our driver serenaded and danced for his female companion up front, using every opportunity to show off his ability to drive with no hands through traffic and around the curves of the mountain highway. At the top of the mountain, trees grew over the stone walkway to the statue, providing shade from the hot Brazilian sun. Monkeys danced in the trees above us, often mimicking tourists stopping to take pictures of the scenery. The summit was the resting place for a statue which stood over 13 stories tall and made the city below a distant memory. One of the most impressive features of the statue was the detail taken to carve a heart upon his chest and puncture



wounds in his hands. Being constructed in the late 1920's, every piece of the statue had to be -dragged up the mountain by cart drawn by either horses or men. Perseverance has been more defined at the pedestal of this transcendental monument than at any other man made structure I had ever seen.

From the viewing deck, you could see the entire city of Rio, it seemed to stretch- on forever with no end. In the distance was Estadio do Maracana, the largest soccer stadium in Brazil an engineering feat in and of itself, yet was a small distant thought in the shadow of this impressive statue.

Before I knew it, we were back on our plane to Houston, and my body told me it was not a moment too soon. As we flew through the dark night over a waveless ocean, I realized I went to Brazil with every worry in the world. Would I have the answers to the youth's questions? Am I doing the right thing by volunteering to council these children with their every day issues? Am I living this life the right way? But I didn't think of any of those things on my return flight. I learned that no matter how insurmountable an issue may seem -, with sheer perseverance and a strong will of determination, even these Everest-esque problems can become the most insignificant mole hills. I mean if HHH can saddle up and ride King Kong, then finishing school, providing guidance to youth, and working to make ends meet should be as easy as hang-gliding on a Pterodactyl.

PHOTO GALLERY



26.2 with Donna Booth



What a great event to teach folks about 511 and to support breast cancer research!

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