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PARADISE LIVING ARTICLE / OCT 2017

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Weathering the Storm!

Hurricane Irma was a beast of a storm and is one we will be talking about for decades to come. From a boating perspective, my heart sank as the storm was approaching Collier County from the south and the projected path was expected to be just offshore. Collier County is situated with very shallow offshore waters extending out for many miles. This makes Collier County coastal areas very susceptible to wind driven storm surge and is why the predicted surge was expected to be anywhere from eight to fifteen feet above normal high-water levels. Hurricanes rotate counter clockwise so as a storm approaches from the south, winds were offshore out of the east actually sucking the water out. As the storm moved north of us, the winds clocked around from the west and pushed water inshore. There are three factors that limited the storm surge and, in turn, mitigated the storm surge damage that could have occurred.

The first factor was that the most powerful area of Hurricane Irma seemed to have been concentrated in the northeastern quadrant, which is typical for any Hurricane in the Atlantic and Gulf Basin approaching from the south. This is why my heart sank with the projected offshore path. This would have put the coastal areas of the Collier County in the most powerful quadrant of the storm and, with it, a potential massive storm surge. That storm surge would have put much of our coastal areas under water and, along with it, powerful waves on top of that storm surge. The damage could have been many times worse and that is something I do not want to contemplate and am quite grateful that it did not occur.

The second factor that kept the storm surge at bay was the southern quadrants of Hurricane Irma were significantly weaker than the northern quadrants. As the storm moved north of us and the winds clocked around from the west, there was much less intensity to push water inshore. The lower wind speeds just did not have the power to push the massive amounts water inshore as expected. Thank goodness for that!

The third and final factor that kept the storm surge to a minimum is that Hurricane Irma made landfall earlier than expected. Hurricanes are fueled by warm water and our Gulf coastal waters are some of the warmest in our hemisphere. Making landfall early cut off some of the fuel supply to the storm and this decreased the wind speeds rapidly. If the eye had remained just offshore of the West Coast of Florida, the storm could have kept its intensity and potentially even strengthened.

The marine industry, yachts and boats in Southwest Florida for the most part survived with minimal damage, considering the size and intensity of Hurricane Irma. The marine industry and boaters dodged a very large bullet and we are very grateful for that.