

Ike Devastates University,

Spares New Press



Just days before Hurricane Ike brought destruction to the University of Texas Medical Branch, Otis Johnson (left), Pete Rocha and Donald Bjerke began receiving training on their in-plant's new Presstek 34DI press from Presstek team leader Michael Gansky (right).

The in-plant had just installed its long-awaited DI press.

Then the hurricane struck.

By Bob Neubauer

IT HAD been a test of perseverance, and Otis Johnson had finally won.

Three years ago, the manager of Printing and Graphic Services at the University of Texas Medical Branch put in a proposal for a direct imaging offset press. He had analyzed the amount of short-run, four-color work his in-plant was producing on two-color Heidelberg and decided a DI press would be the perfect solution.

But before his proposal could be approved, the university president retired. The interim administration would not act on it, so Johnson waited patiently.

When the new president came on board, Johnson tried again. This time he got the green light. So he ordered a Presstek 34DI press, along with a Dimension 800 computer-to-plate system, to make plates for the shop's

two Heidelberg and three ABDick duplicators.

In September, after three years of waiting, the installation was finally complete, and training began.

"My operators, their eyes were glowing when they saw that four-color quality that it was putting out," Johnson recalls. "It was a happy time—until September 11."

That was the day employees were forced to evacuate the city of Galveston. Because while installation and training were going on, Hurricane Ike was gathering steam over the nearby Gulf of Mexico. Johnson and his staff had no choice but to cover up the equipment in their second-floor in-plant, move everything away from the windows and head out of town. Johnson fled inland where he watched the destruction of Galveston Island on television. ►

“It was eerie to be sitting somewhere else watching the waves crash and the water rise,” he recalls. The storm surge brought up to 12 feet of water into the city, he says. “It was unbelievable.”

A Long, Tense Wait

As he watched, all he could think about was that new equipment he had waited so long to get.

“That’s the main thing that was on my mind,” he says. “If the windows were breached in some sort of way,

“We really wanted to be a four-color shop, and the DI allowed us to do that.”

—Otis Johnson

my shop would have been shot. It would have been devastated.”

After the storm moved on, Johnson returned to his home near Galveston, but still he could not get any news about how his in-plant had fared. No one was permitted back on the island for a week. “I was pulling my hair out,” he says.

Finally he was allowed to return. He quickly learned that the first floor of his building had taken in four to five feet of water. More water had poured down from the roof through the elevator shaft and damaged the fourth and fifth floors. But when he looked in on his in-plant and his new DI press, he saw that they were untouched by water damage. All the machines were just as he had left them more than a week before.

His relief, though, was tempered by some bad news.

“I lost my quick copy operation, which is on campus,” he says. “It took about four feet of water.”

When he got there, the copy shop was full of mud, trash and oil residue. He could see the high-water mark on the wall at chest level. The flood had submerged his Xerox 4110 and DocuColor 252.

“Luckily they were leased,” he says.

Also destroyed were computers and supplies. And that wasn’t all.

“We also lost our two delivery vehicles,” he says.

Still, that was nothing compared to the overall loss at the university, which he estimates at between \$600 and \$700 million.

As of press time, Johnson and his staff had still not been able to return to their in-plant. He has been busy on the phone, finding outside printers to handle the university’s work.

“I’m making relationships with vendors I didn’t even know existed,” he laughs.

Johnson looks forward to getting back to the shop and completing training on the new DI press.

“We really wanted to be a four-color shop, and the DI allowed us to do that,” he says.

Likewise, he’s excited to get the new Dimension 800 up and running, so the shop can finally leave film behind.

“That’s going to help us streamline quite a bit,” he says. **IPG**