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Press Release

Law Enforcement Aviation Coalition Assists Hurricane Victims

Local team among the first responders in New Orleans

Winthrop Harbor, IL - September 6, 2005. The Winthrop Harbor Police Department provided details today surrounding a recent helicopter mission to New Orleans. The *Law Enforcement Aviation Coalition ("LEAC")*, which is coordinated by the Winthrop Harbor Police Department, operates a twin-engine Eurocopter EC135 helicopter which is based at the Kenosha, WI regional airport. The privately owned helicopter is donated for use as airborne support to law enforcement and fire agencies from throughout the region.

Shortly after the hurricane made landfall last week, LEAC officials received a call from Medline Industries, Inc. of Mundelein, IL, with a request to assist with the evacuation of patients and staff at Medline's client hospitals in New Orleans. Most urgent was the need for evacuating an estimated 1,500 people from Tulane Hospital in downtown New Orleans, a facility which had lost both main and backup electric power. Critical care patients were now in a life threatening situation, and time was of the essence.

LEAC Commander Daniel Bitton, along with pilot Randy Olson and Tactical Flight Officers Mike Falasco and Rick Concepcion, were airborne and on the way to New Orleans in less than two hours. They arrived at approximately 10:00 p.m. local time, and immediately began evacuations from Tulane Hospital. Operating from a makeshift heliport atop an eight-story parking garage tucked in between high-rise buildings, the night evacuations involved difficult conditions for the crew, who used sophisticated night vision goggles to maintain adequate clearances during take-offs and landings.

As morning approached it became evident to Commander Bitton that evacuating four to six people at a time would not accomplish the mission quickly enough, given the serious conditions of many of the patients. Commander Bitton contacted the military command to request assistance, and quickly received help by way of two giant Chinook helicopters and two Blackhawk helicopters.

With the five helicopters now operating from the parking garage, nearly 1,800 people were safely evacuated, including over 300 patients that were carried to the parking garage from neighboring Charity Hospital. All of this occurred within the first 20 hours of the LEAC team's arrival in New Orleans.

During the return trips to the parking garage the LEAC Air-One helicopter brought full loads of food, water and medical supplies to the hospital staff as well as to people on rooftops and other locations along their flight path.

After the hospital evacuation was complete, the LEAC crew began rescuing people from rooftops, conducting over 20 such rescues throughout the following day and night. In total, Air-One was flown nearly 60 hours during the three day period it was in New Orleans.

Winthrop Harbor Police Chief, Joel Brumlik, wishes to thank everyone involved and associated with the Law Enforcement Aviation Coalition as well as Mayor Joe Leech, Jr., the Village Board of Trustees and the citizens of Winthrop Harbor for their ongoing support. *"We look to future growth and increased participation to make more missions such as these possible."*, said Brumlik.

Further information about the LEAC program can be found on-line at www.whpd.org.

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