

# Casa Marina survives storm, hosts wedding 24 hours after hurricane hits

By Jennifer Logue

The walls of the historic Casa Marina are adorned with vintage photographs and postcards depicting the historic hotel through the years – from the Roaring Twenties and World War II through 1964's Hurricane Dora and right up to the modern day.

Now the Casa Marina will have new photos to add to its walls, enabling future generations of visitors to marvel that the landmark 1925 hotel situated right on Jacksonville Beach made it through Hurricane Matthew, cementing its place in Beaches lore as the only remaining oceanfront resort from the early 20th century to survive storms, fires and more.

"It was obviously built right," General Manager Mark Vandelloo said. "To weather all that it has over the years, it's almost as though it sits on protected land."

The Casa Marina weathered Hurricane Matthew so well, in fact, that just 24 hours after the storm hammered the First Coast with Category 3 winds and a storm surge that flooded much of the Jacksonville Beach area, the hotel hosted a wedding for a thankful North Florida bride and groom.

"We wanted their wedding to be beautiful," Vandelloo said, "like nothing ever happened."

## Wedding crasher

The Casa Marina had three weddings booked for Friday and Saturday when news reports began to indicate that Matthew was going to be a major storm. And with its oceanfront location, Vandelloo said the decision as to whether to reschedule the events was a difficult one.

"We've had some close calls over the years, but nothing to where we ever felt we would be directly in harm's way," he said. "Once we realized, 'Okay, we're going to get some of this,' it really hit me personally."

The decision on whether to close temporarily was made for the hotel, however, when Jacksonville Mayor Lenny Curry announced a mandatory evacuation for the Beaches communities. The close-knit Casa Marina staff banded together, boarded up



the historic hotel, stacked sandbags and helped relocate guests. After rescheduling the Friday evening and Saturday daytime weddings, the staff retreated from the property and waited for Matthew to crash the party.

"The hardest part was the waiting," Vandelloo said. "On Friday, during the brunt of the storm, I was getting so many texts, with people sending me photos of the waves just rushing over the wall. I finally said, 'I can't take any more pictures.'"

As Saturday dawned and the skies cleared, however, Vandelloo held out hope that Saturday's evening wedding could go on as planned. After waiting in line for the bridges to open, he arrived at the Casa Marina shortly after noon to find that despite some aesthetic damage to the hotel and its penthouse bar area, the historic property had weathered the storm.

When the power came back on at 1 p.m., the wedding was back on.

"(The bride) was ecstatic," Vandelloo said. "You could just tell she was ready to



Photos courtesy of the Casa Marina.

**Mark Vandelloo (seated, center) with some of the Casa Marina staff.**

hear some good news."

Working with his staff, Vandelloo cleaned up the debris and prepped the hotel for the 6 p.m. wedding ceremony, followed by a cocktail reception and dinner for 130 guests.

"I was very moved and so proud of my team," he said.

Vandelloo noted that while a wedding

guest joked that no matter what, the happy bride and groom could never name a child Matthew, the Casa Marina family will soon have a new addition bearing that name.

"Rebecca Lowry, our director of sales, is due any day," Vandelloo noted. "Her husband's name is Matthew and their son is going to be named Matthew, too."

## State to host webinar on disaster recovery assistance for historic properties

The state Division of Historic Resources will hold a one-hour webinar Thursday, Oct. 20 at 1 p.m. on "Disaster Recovery and Assistance for Historic Properties."

The webinar will aim to educate homeowners, government officials and nonprofits on financial programs that are available

to assist them with the disaster recovery process. Advance registration is required in order to participate. To register, go to <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8073978143438148610>. Registrants will receive a confirmation email with information on how to join the webinar.

At the time of the event, registrants will participate at [GoToWebinar.com](http://GoToWebinar.com) and joining the session using webinar ID 843-988-411. Participants may use their speakers and a headset to access audio through VOIP, or use their telephone. Dial-in numbers for the webinar are (213) 929-4212,

access code 565-628-817. And audio PIN number will be shown after joining the webinar.

For additional information, contact Ken Cureton with the Division of Historical Resources at [Ken.Cureton@dos.myflorida.com](mailto:Ken.Cureton@dos.myflorida.com) or 850.245.6343.