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Monday, March 20, 2006

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THE FEDERAL 100

The Masters of Disaster

Everybody knows the missteps and the inertia that marked the federal government's response to Hurricane Katrina. But that is not the complete picture, as we learned in putting together the 2006 Federal 100 award program. We can across accounts of people in government and industry who truly rose to the occasion, saving lives and ensuring that essential services were provided in the hours, days and weeks after the storm surged through the Gulf Coast region. Here are some of those stories.

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President

Markle Foundation

Under the leadership of its president, Zoë Baird, the Markle Foundation quickly organized Katrina-Health.org, a nationwide online service that lets health professionals access the electronic health records of people displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

KatrinaHealth.org formed through the collaborative efforts of the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, the American Medical Association and companies such as SureScripts, a provider of electronic pharmacy services, and RxHub, which collects and delivers patient-specific medication histories.

Charlene Underwood, director of government and industry affairs at Siemens Medical Solutions, said such collaboration is a hallmark of Baird's leadership at Markle. The foundation's Connecting for Health projects link multiple partners to create electronic health care systems. Katrina-Health.org demonstrated the power of collaborative technology efforts, she added.



The Federal 100: A year like no other

Hurricane Katrina dominated this year's Federal 100 Awards, in much the same way that it has dominated the headlines for the past six months

BY John Monroe

Published on Mar. 20, 2006

Hurricane Katrina dominated this year's Federal 100 Awards, in much the same way that it has dominated the headlines for the past six months. All told, hurricane-related work figured into the nominations of 18 winners, although a few of those recipients ultimately were selected for other reasons.

Never before have so many Federal 100 awards been tied to a single event or issue. But those results should come as no surprise: A disaster on the scale of Hurricane Katrina was bound to bring out the best in people.

Yet despite the life-and-death stakes of their work last fall, those 18 people are not unlike the other winners on this year's list. Whatever the circumstance, most winners in any year are able to make a difference because of a potent mix of ingenuity and determination. They see a problem, and they have the insight and fortitude to solve it.

The disaster response also highlighted a complex aspect of the Federal 100 awards program. The awards are given to individuals, not teams, because we believe the most important work is done when one person steps up and serves as a catalyst. But in the long run, such work often could not be done without the support of a team or the backing of an organization.

This dynamic was especially important in industry. With Hurricane Katrina, many company executives went above and beyond any reasonable expectation of customer service. As soon as the extent of the crisis became clear, they came forward and offered up the brainpower, manpower and material resources of their companies.

That could not have happened without the blessing of their corporate offices. But then, Federal 100 winners, whether in industry or government, usually have a knack for helping other people understand what work must be done and why.

So it was a remarkable year, and yet it was like every other year in that so many members of the federal IT community, faced with vexing problems or pressing needs, managed to rise to the occasion, as they so often do.