



West winds throw waves against the Ebeye Pier early last week.

📷 Deo Eddo Keju

# USAG-KA COMMUNITY RALLIES AGAINST WINDS

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wajalein Atoll and the rest of the Marshall Islands were battered by one of the worst El Niño-related weather episodes in recent history. A ferocious pack of westerly winds swooped through the region during the morning of Oct. 7, holding the islands hostage for nearly 24 hours.

Pumping in sustained gusts of up to 43 mph, the front wrecked residents' boats, stranded nearly 850 Ebeye residents overnight on Kwajalein and tested the garrison's emergency responses capabilities.

For safety reasons, all ferry runs were halted during the late morning hours of Oct. 7. This wasn't necessarily an unprecedented move: In the months of exceedingly damag-

ing winds that this year's El Niño system has produced locally, ferry runs have been occasionally halted. Wind-driven chop in the lagoon had made it unsafe to run the ferry boats at times, and allowing time for the lagoon to calm down and make for safer passage between the islands had usually solved the problem. But on Oct. 7, that calm never came, and garrison leaders had a serious problem on their hands. 845 Ebeye residents who had come to Kwajalein earlier in the day had no way of getting home. They were stuck on Kwajalein overnight for the first time in recorded history.

Kwajalein Range Services President Cynthia Rivera and garrison leaders immediately set up a plan to house and provide meals for their Marshallese guests, Rivera said. The decision to immediately ramp up the meal counts at the Zamperini Dining Facility was made, and a plan to find beds for the guests began.

"We talked through all of the potential housing options and capacities and other resources, such as blankets, pillows and cots," Rivera said. "We knew that our community would step in to help, so our first option was to request volunteers to house colleagues and friends. We prioritized the facilities that we would use, if needed, beyond the Kwaj Lodge, Macy's and BQs, such as the CRC, ARC, REB, MP room, MDA homes, etc."

381 individuals were, fortunately, able to check into the Kwaj Lodge, and they did so in less than three hours, a true record, Rivera said. 140 stayed overnight in the work areas, and many others found a place to stay in the homes of residents who pulled together all the extra bedding they could find. Volunteers within the community, such as Protestant Pastor Heather Ardrey and residents Mike and Linda Lowry, also stepped up to take care of the 60 Ebeye residents stranded overnight at the DSC. An influx of food, blankets and pillows helped get the R.M.I. citizens through the night until the ferry runs opened up again early the next morning.



A ferry boat gets pounded during a morning run to Ebeye Oct. 8.

📷 Jordan Vinson