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FINAL EDITION

For Openers

Mulberry High opens its football season with a 35-21 win over Evangel Christian. **C1**



HURRICANE KATRINA

DEVASTATION

CLOSE CALL | NEW ORLEANS IS SPARED A DIRECT HIT

MONSTER STORM | SYSTEM WEAKENS TO CATEGORY 4 BEFORE LANDFALL

EMERGENCY RESPONSE | FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RUSHES SUPPLIES TO THE AREA

Lakeland Electric Faces Gas Shortage

By RICK ROUSOS
The Ledger

LAKELAND — Hurricane Katrina never got closer than a few hundred miles from Polk County, but Lakeland may suffer one of her consequences.

The utility is low on the natural gas burned in most of its generators. And on Monday, pipelines in Mobile Bay, the only two natural gas lines into Florida, were stingy with supplying gas, utility spokesman Kevin Cook said. The Mobile Bay area is evolving into a natural gas hub in the southeastern United States and was hit hard by Katrina.

As a result, Lakeland Electric is asking its customers to — please — conserve electricity.

Today will be critical for Lakeland Electric. The utility bought gas from Texas that it hopes will arrive today, but to do so it needs to get the fuel into one of the pipelines.

"If it does get here, there's no problem at all," Cook said.

"If the transmission of natural gas is not resumed and there's no fuel to power our generators,

PLEASE SEE PIPELINE, PAGE A3

Drivers Expect Polk Gas Price Hike

By KEVIN BOUFFARD
The Ledger

LAKELAND — Ralph Weeks doesn't see good news ahead.

The chairman of Quality Petroleum Corp, a Lakeland distributor, offers a pessimistic forecast about local gas prices, thanks to Hurricane Katrina.

"I think we will have a problem because the barges can't get across the Gulf, and that's where the gasoline comes from," he said. "We're in as decent shape as we

PLEASE SEE GAS, PAGE A5



DAVE MARTIN/The Associated Press

Hurricane Katrina battered the Gulf Coast on Monday, making landfall with 145-mph winds. Arnold James, above, tries to keep his feet as a strong gust nearly blows him over as he makes his way on foot to shelter at the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans. Below, Bryan Vernon and Dorothy Bell are rescued from their roof after their New Orleans neighborhood was flooded. Right, cars lie covered in fallen debris from buildings in downtown New Orleans.



ERIC GAY/The Associated Press



DAVE MARTIN/The Associated Press

Storm Blamed For 55 Deaths

Neighborhoods are flooded to rooftops; 1 million are left without power.

By ALLEN G. BREED
The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Announcing itself with shrieking, 145-mph winds, Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast just outside New Orleans on Monday, submerging entire neighborhoods up to their roofs, swamping Mississippi's beachfront casinos and killing at least 55 people.

Jim Pollard, spokesman for Mississippi's Harrison County emergency operations center, said 50 people were killed by Katrina in his county, with the bulk of the deaths at an apartment complex in Biloxi. Three other people were killed by falling trees in Mississippi and two died in a traffic accident in Alabama, authorities said.

For New Orleans — a dangerously vulnerable city because it sits mostly below sea level in a bowl-shaped depression — it was not the apocalyptic storm forecasters had feared.

But it was plenty bad, in New Orleans and elsewhere along the

PLEASE SEE KATRINA, PAGE A3

Pensacola Flooded By Water, Evacuees

By JOE FOLLICK
Ledger Tallahassee Bureau

PENSACOLA — Pensacola Beach and Perdido Key were swamped by Hurricane Katrina's storm surge Monday morning as gusts of more than 60 mph buried roads in sand and pushed Escambia Bay water into Pensacola's downtown.

But when judged against the lingering damage inflicted by Hurricane Ivan last year and Dennis in July, officials in Florida's western-most county were almost giddy with the relatively gentle aftermath of Katrina.

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Nelson Serrano lawyers push to admit polygraph at trial. **B1**

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TIP OF THE DAY
ISO Music & Martinis at The Lakeland Center. Ages 21 and older.

WEATHER
Showers expected today in Polk; high, 89, low, 77. **B6**

LAKELAND/DAILY

