

South Florida

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Jane Crowley, of Work Opportunities Unlimited, coaches Robert Beckerman, 23, of Parkland, as he works at Marshall's.



JOE CAVARETTA, SUN SENTINEL

LEARNING ABOUT 9 TO 5

Transferring into workplace

Fiercer Fay has Cubans evacuating

By Ray Sanchez
HAVANA BUREAU

HAVANA » Tropical Storm Fay unleashed downpours and strong winds over southeastern Cuba on Sunday, prompting mass evacuations of people and livestock, and the island's top meteorologist said the storm could near hurricane strength as it churns over Cuba.

In central Cuba, authorities in five provinces evacuated more than 3,000 residents from low-lying areas. Temporary shelters and food distribution centers were set up at hotels and schools. A banana plantation sustained minor flooding in Granma province and storm winds damaged roofs on some homes, state media reported. No serious injuries were reported.

"This is a weak system," Jose Rubiera, Cuba's chief meteorologist, said on state television. "It's a tropical storm, not a hurricane. As it advances it will intensify, but we don't think it will reach hurricane strength. It may reach the maximum limits of a tropical storm, but the winds will not be that strong."

Rubiera said Fay brought gusts of up to 70 mph as it swirled close to coastal communities on Cuba's southern tip, but he said authorities were mostly concerned about the effects of downpours.

In the central provinces, residents and civil defense authorities hoped the warm waters beneath the storm do not strengthen it too much before it comes ashore late Sunday or early Monday near Playa Giron in Mantanzas.

"Right now, we're getting light rain and wind," said Juan Manuel Perez, a civil defense worker in Camaguey. "We're waiting, but we expect the rain to pick up in the next eight hours."

Authorities evacuated dozens of sparsely populated, low-lying communities and ordered Cubans to pay close attention to the storm. Cuba issued a hurricane warning from Havana eastward to central Santo Spiritus province.

Fay's path was expected to take it near the southern coast Sunday and over central and western Cuba on Sunday night or today. The storm struck eastern Cuba Saturday night with gusty winds and rain, but there were no reports of injuries and only minor damage and flooding.

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Weather could get rough this evening

briefing. "They should be aware that impacts can be broader than where the storm track indicates."

Until Sunday, South Florida had been expecting the system to hit Port Charlotte on the southwest coast. Then Fay surged forward. While near Cuba, the system charged west at up to 23 mph on Sunday. South Florida still will see gusts up to 45 mph and up to 3 inches of rain today and Tuesday, said meteorologist Roberto Garcia of the National Weather Service in Miami.

Because the Keys feared Fay could arrive as a hurricane, Monroe County officials ordered all visitors and those living in low-lying areas to evacuate.

In Key West, residents took the threat in stride. "I've got plenty of bottled water, batteries and ice," said Jimmy Vallortigara, 57, a clerk at the Truval Village Market Place on Duval Street. "And I also have my booze and five cans of Spam."

Staff Writers Josh Hafenbrack and Mike Clary contributed to this report. Ken Kaye can be reached at kkaye@sunsentinel.com or 954-385-7911.



JOE CAVARETTA, SUN SENTINEL

Joe Mariscalco finishes putting up hurricane shutters Sunday on a rental home he owns in Oakland Park. South Florida could get gusts up to 45 mph and 3 inches of rain today and Tuesday.



JOE CAVARETTA, SUN SENTINEL

Dlessy Mannattuparampil, of Pembroke Pines, dances with the Rhythms School of Dance in Davie, during a celebration of Indian independence Sunday at Broward College in Coconut Creek. India won its freedom from Britain on Aug. 15, 1947.

INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATED

Hundreds gather to mark 61 years of liberty for India

By Susannah Bryan
STAFF WRITER

COCONUT CREEK » The lights dimmed.

Three girls in colorful costumes took the stage. Before them sat dozens of families who had come to celebrate India's independence Sunday at Broward College's Coconut Creek campus.

The girls broke into song, kicking off the festivities with a prayer to Lord Ganesh, an elephant-headed Hindu god known as the remover of obstacles. Balloons in orange, green and white — the colors of India's flag — bobbed around the room.

"This is like our Fourth of July," said Sreeranjini Raja, a Jupiter woman from southwestern India.

India, the world's largest democracy by population, won its freedom Aug. 15, 1947, after more than 200 years of British rule.

The local festival, organized

by the Association of Indians in America, drew more than 1,000 people from throughout South Florida. Many dressed in bejeweled saris and displayed the traditional bindi, an ornamental mark on the forehead symbolizing a spiritual third eye.

Throughout the day, dancers of all ages twirled around the stage, showing the diverse clothing and style of various regions of India.

Piyush Agrawal, a retired educator who lives in Weston, reflected on India's history and what might have been had the British left it alone.

"India would have been much better if the British never came," Agrawal said. "They raided the country and made it poor."

Rajiv Krishnan, of Coral Springs, agreed India might have been wealthier if not for the British. But in keeping with the spirit of the day, he urged looking at the bright side.

"They gave us the English language," he said, then added with a chuckle, "and they gave us cricket."

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"India would have been much better if the British never came. They raided the country and made it poor."

Piyush Agrawal, retired educator from Weston

Program teaches disabled young adults life skills.

BY Maria Chercoles
STAFF WRITER

MARGATE » It wasn't an average Monday for Robert Beckerman, who works at Marshall's in Margate. He couldn't enter the employee lounge; the access code had been changed.

A confused Beckerman, who has autism, went looking for his coach, repeating the words, "door broken."

Beckerman, 23, is one of the hundreds of disabled students that the post-graduate program Alternatives for Secondary Students has helped transition into adulthood. The 12-year-old program, known as PASS, teaches disabled youths life skills and helps them look for first jobs.

"There are not many resources for this population after they leave the school system and it's crucial that they receive the support they have here," said Alicia Grigull, Exceptional Student Education specialist at the Atlantic Technical Center in Coconut Creek, where the program is based.

"Twenty years ago, people wouldn't even try having disabled employees."

Jane Crowley,

Robert Beckerman's coach

Students first learn how to manage money, keep a schedule and use the public transportation system. Then a career coach identifies potential employers based on their interest. Training follows.

Marshall's has a partnership with the program and allows disabled people to train in its facilities, but it doesn't guarantee any position. The department store hired Beckerman in spring 2007 after he completed the program.

"They were instrumental in getting him the job and now he has succeeded on his own and is quite proud of his accomplishment," said Andrea Beckerman, his mother.

For the last year, Beckerman has been working at the back room of Marshall's twice a week. There, he receives clothes shipments to hang by style, color, size and gender. He has limited communication skills, so his coach uses verbal cues such as "fix," "shoulders," or "straighten" to guide him through his workday.

"Twenty years ago, people wouldn't even try having disabled employees," said Jane Crowley, Beckerman's coach.

Beckerman keeps a card with his daily schedule, which he follows to the minute.

For information on PASS, call 754-321-5100.

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