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The Palm Beach Post

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Bush promises help

Death toll reaches 16; disaster in 25 counties

By JOHN BISOGNANO, ANDREW MARRA, STACEY SINGER and WILLIAM M. HARTNETT
Palm Beach Post Staff Writers

Less than two days after the winds stilled, President Bush got a firsthand glimpse Sunday at Hurricane Charley's awful toll on southwest Florida.

During his 2½-hour ground and air tour of the disaster area in and around Punta Gorda and Port Charlotte, Bush promised rapid federal aid for the thousands of residents left with little more than the clothes they were wearing when Charley ravaged Florida's gulf coast Friday.

As federal, state and private relief efforts picked up steam, officials on Sunday raised the storm's statewide death toll to 16 and expanded the federal disaster aid zone from four to 25 counties along the broad path Charley took from Florida's southwest to northeast coasts. The counties in the zone include Glades, Hendry, Okeechobee and Indian River.

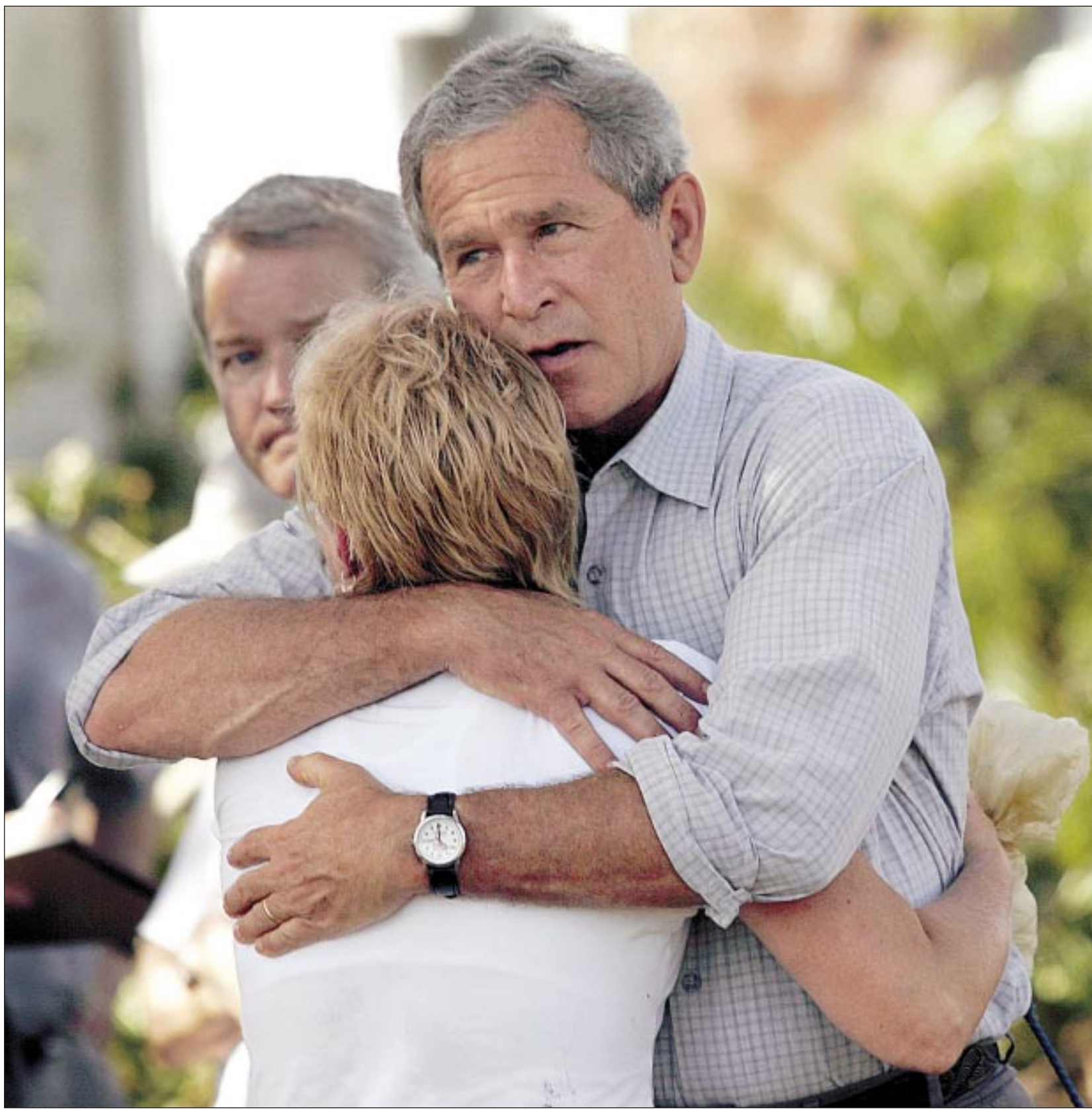
Just under a million people were still without power, and about 2,300 remained in emergency shelters.

"My own mother asked me when her power would be turned on and I said, 'I don't know, Mother.'" said Lt. Gov. Toni Jennings, whose family lives in Orlando. "When the lights go on, they're on."

Tons of water, food and building materials were loaded onto semitrailers Sunday at Lakeland Linder Regional Airport, the staging area for the federal relief effort. Florida National Guardsmen and state workers there unloaded a huge Air Force cargo plane and trucks laden with generators, cots, blankets, hammers, nails and other supplies.

Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Mike Brown said Sunday that a

See CHARLEY, 8A ►



CHRIS LIVINGSTON/EPA

President Bush hugs a woman Sunday in Punta Gorda, as U.S. Rep. Mark Foley looks on. Bush toured there and Port Charlotte, the areas hardest hit by Charley.

Much more online

Get news updates on recovery efforts, see more than 100 photos and video of the destruction and track the tropics.

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Hundreds report illegal price gouging

The state promises to prosecute violators, **14A**

Nursing home patients evacuated

Many brought to Palm Beach County. **Local, 1C**

Coverage, 8A-16A

Amid rubble, some items oddly untouched

By ANDREW MARRA
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

PUNTA GORDA — On a walkway strewn with rumbled fences, torn roofs and ruptured walls, a cast-iron man named *De-Terminator* survived Hurricane Charley's fury without a flinch.

For no apparent reason, the modernist sculpture on display in Punta Gorda's downtown district survived winds that laid ruin to nearly everything around it — a bright spot in

a city mired in rubble.

Two blocks away, the wall of a floral shop lay open and the roof was collapsed into the building. But on a glass shelf sat two vases, shining as if they had been dusted hours earlier.

As residents and business owners here spent the weekend picking through the rubble of demolished properties and lives, there was the occasional glimmer: a piece of art or maybe an heirloom inexplicably left un-

touched as Charley mowed through.

They seemed like strokes of fortune, sometimes bizarre chance.

"Man, my mom had like 200 snow bunnies up on this shelf and they weren't even damaged. Can you believe that?" said Dale Richards, gesturing in the kitchen of his mother's Punta Gorda-area house, which now had no roof but 200 undamaged figurines.

And so it was throughout the city, where

See UNTOUCHED, 14A ►

Faith guides Punta Gorda worshipers through storm's aftermath

By KATHLEEN CHAPMAN
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

PUNTA GORDA — Charles Kidd woke up early and went to church Sunday morning, as he always does.

His home was gone, along with all the possessions he accumulated during 58 years of marriage. But the retired Navy man still rose to greet worshipers at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, showing them the way into the darkened building.

He apologized for his casual shirt and shorts.

"Normally, I wear a suit," he said.

Few parishioners knew whether the church would hold Mass. Some came at the regular

'It's hard to see everything like this. The city is gone.'

HENRY BOLAS
Punta Gorda resident

time, figuring they could pray in a field if all the buildings were destroyed. Others saw the cardboard signs their pastor, Jerry Kaywell, wrote by hand.

Nearly 50 people found their way to the church for the 7 a.m. service. By 8:30 a.m., there were 100.

The main church building was destroyed, so the members

gathered in the parish center across the street. They had no power, so they shined flashlights up at the ceiling. They couldn't make out the words of the hymns, so they sang the one they knew by heart — *Salve Regina*.

Outside, pieces of insulation dangled from trees like tinsel. Traffic lights sat dark and useless. Downed power lines crossed the parking lot. Ruined homes sat abandoned, the names of insurance companies painted on the side.

Bishop John J. Nevins drove from the diocese headquarters in Venice to visit the church. He prayed for those who died and

See CHURCH, 12A ►



Ed and Joan Downing attend Mass Sunday in the parish hall of the destroyed Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Punta Gorda, where the power was out.

GARY CORONADO
Staff Photographer



Weather:
Thunderstorms.
High 90,
low 78.
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CROSSWORD 5E
DEATHS 5B
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HOROSCOPE 2D
LOTTERY 2A
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3 (10)

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Vijay wins PGA Championship
Singh comes from behind to win 3-way playoff. **Sports, 1C**

Two U.S. soldiers killed in Najaf
Iraq says its army will take over the battle from U.S. forces. **Story, 3A**

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