

A Case Study: Sundance Orchids and Bromeliads and Hurricane Irma

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Suggested Citation

Gillen, M. (2022). *A case study: Sundance Orchids and Bromeliads and Hurricane Irma*. Global Education Lab. <https://www.globaleducationlab.org/portfolio/gillen>

This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under award number 2019-70003-29092. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Sundance Orchids and Bromeliads

<https://sundanceorchids.com/about-us/>

Sundance Orchids and Bromeliads is a retail and wholesale nursery located in southwest Florida; Fort Myers area in Lee County. The nursery has nine greenhouses that provide over 20,000 square feet of space and is located on about five acres, making it the area's largest retail orchid nursery. While Sundance specializes in orchids and caters to both the orchid fancier and collector, they also offer a selection of bromeliad varieties, ferns, succulents and such. In addition to the sale of plants, they offer orchid repotting services, supplies, free advice, and events and classes such as a summer camp about orchids. The nursery also provides an orchid "babysitting" service for customers, particularly for those who often only use their Florida home during winter months.

History of Sundance Orchids and Bromeliads

<https://sundanceorchids.com/about-us/>

Sundance Orchids & Bromeliads was founded by Lee Behrhorst in 2001. After retiring in the mid-nineties he decided to move from his home in Pittsburg to sunny Southwest Florida. As an avid gardener, he soon found that the gated community he lived in was not a great place for his hobby. With little chance to have a large garden, he shifted his interests to orchids and began collecting them on his lanai. Quickly his collection grew, and one day while reading the paper on the lanai, his wife was unexpectedly soaked by his automatic sprinkler system that he had installed for the plants. Not happy, she strongly suggested he figured out a new location for his ever growing collection. So his search for a nursery began. In summer of 2001 he found a rundown greenhouse, made all the necessary repairs, and in November he opened a little retail orchid business called Sundance Orchids.

Just like his orchid collection grew rapidly, so did the business. Opening with approximately 3,000 orchids, the business has grown into a collection of approximately 25,000! As the business grew, more greenhouses were added. As years went on, Mr. Behrhorst also became interested in bromeliads, and decided to add them to the collection. You can learn more about bromeliads by reviewing [Bromeliads at a Glance](#). The once little orchid nursery now also carries a huge selection of approximately 20,000 bromeliads! In what has went from approximately 9,000 square foot of greenhouse space to 70,000 square foot of greenhouse space!

In 2016, Mr. Behrhorst was ready to retire again. However, he wanted Sundance Orchids & Bromeliads to continue. After many talks with his longtime employee and orchid enthusiast Jacki Garland, Mr. Behrhorst agreed to sell the business to Jacki and her other half Elijah Garland.

Jacki, originally born in Iowa, is a long time southwest Florida resident who previously worked at Sundance for seven years. Crazy about plants, with a background in studying horticulture, she was excited for the opportunity to keep Sundance Orchids & Bromeliads going. Elijah Garland, born in Indiana and resident of Fort Myers since 2005, however had no background in plants. Except for his very crowded lanai full of Jacki's ever growing plant addiction. He had

been working for an aftermarket automotive parts manufacturer in Naples for 10 years, selling what he calls 'engine jewelry' for custom hot rods and muscle cars. However, ready for a chance to get out of the office setting and outside, he was eager to take on the challenge with Jacki.

In January 2017 the ownership change took place. However, the first year of ownership for Jacki and Elijah proved to be a challenge. Nine months after they took over, Hurricane Irma wreaked havoc on the nursery. Greenhouse roofs were ripped off, plants destroyed, and half of one of the buildings was put out of commission completely. While the cleanup process has been long and slow, Sundance Orchids & Bromeliads is finally starting to get back to normal. The garden landscapes have been redone and a lot of the needed repairs to the greenhouses were made.



Figure 1. Elijah and Jacki Garland, owners of Sundance Orchids and Bromeliads.

Source: Sundance Orchids and Bromeliads; <https://sundanceorchids.com>

Hurricane Irma

According to the National Weather Service (NWS; n.d.), Hurricane Irma formed in late August 2017 off the coast of Africa. Hurricane Irma moved across the Atlantic, quickly gaining strength to become a Category 5 storm with sustained winds of 185 mph, as it approached the Caribbean in early September. It weakened to a Category 4 with sustained winds of 130 as it slightly veered towards the north and headed to the Florida Keys. It crossed over the Florida Keys on September 10, 2017.

According to the Ft. Myers Beach News, Island Sand Paper (2017), the progression of the storm continued throughout the southwest coast of Florida. On Sunday, September 10, 2017, Irma reached Marco Island, 40 miles south of Fort Myers Beach, as a Category 4 storm. It reached

Fort Myers Beach on Sunday evening as a Category 2 hurricane. All of Lee County experienced hurricane force winds.

Grocery stores quickly ran out of food and water, while most gas stations had run out of fuel one to two days before Irma hit. Heavy tree and fence damage was widespread. In the western half of South Florida, including Lee County, over 90% of customers lost power and for periods of over a week. The heaviest damage occurred in these western areas where some structural damage was noted, along with flooding damage from storm surge and rainfall. According to the Lee County Government (2018), the damage assessment to Lee County included commercial losses totaling \$102.4 million, residential losses totaling \$725.9 million, and other losses totaling \$4.4 million. The impacts of Hurricane Irma on Lee County are shown in Figure 2.

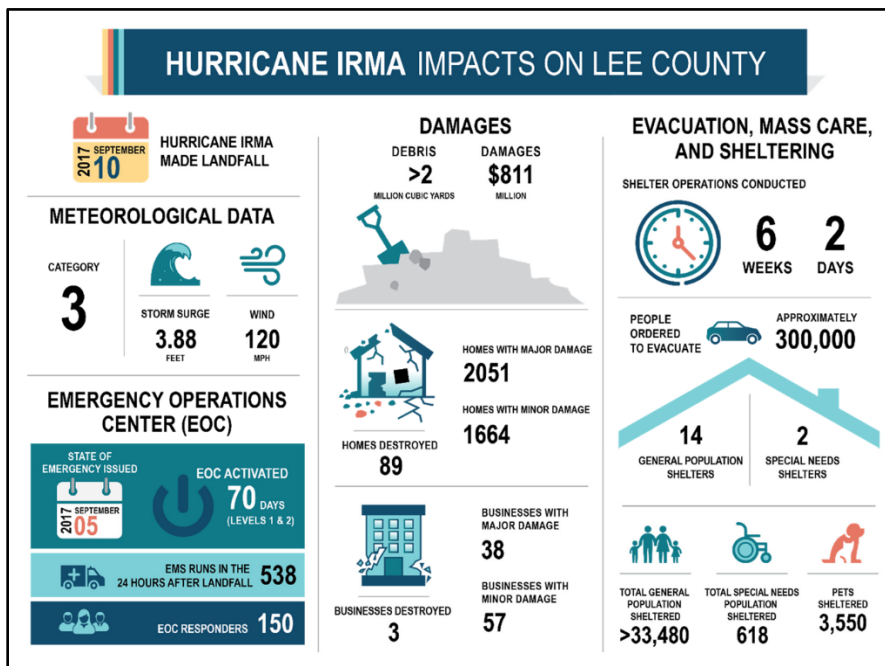


Figure 2. Lee County Hurricane Irma impacts (Lee County Government, 2019).

Hurricane Irma and Sundance

Sundance suffered major damage, as a result of Hurricane Irma. The prior and current owners had no experience preparing for or recovering from a hurricane. The lack of experience and knowledge created difficulties for preparing for the hurricane and clean up after the hurricane. Following the hurricane, they considered closing their new business but instead moved forward. They had no insurance on the business facilities, plants and equipment, due to the astronomical cost of insurance. They had five employees prior to landfall of Hurricane Irma. They told their employees to leave, if needed to make their own hurricane preparations. Three employees stayed to help prepare Sundance.

A week prior to the storm, Jacki started worrying. Elijah was away doing work at part-time car shows, and at the time, he did not know much about plants. Five days prior to the storm, he flew back to help Jacki to prepare for the storm. On September 10, 2017, just nine months after

Jacki and Elijah took over the business, hurricane Irma hit the nursery, causing major structural damages. They had placed the plants on the ground, but they did not know to cut the plastic from the greenhouse roofs. Once the plastic roofs were ripped off of the greenhouses, the structures twisted and the plants lost the much needed shade. All greenhouses lost their roofs, and some buildings were heavily damaged. As plants became exposed to direct sunlight after the storm, they started dying. As a result of the missing protection a lot of the plants were lost. They received some help with labor by posting on social media and salvaged what they could.

The clean-up started right away, but it has been a long and slow recovery process. Jacki and Elijah personally paid for all of the repairs. With limited funds, they had to prioritize repairs over the last two years, due to the cost of repairs and having no insurance. Sundance Orchids & Bromeliads is finally starting to get back to normal having repaired the last greenhouse in February 2020.

After learning many lessons through experiencing Hurricane Irma, Jacki and Elijah feel they are equipped properly prepare for and recover from a hurricane. They are creating a disaster preparedness plan. Most recently, hurricane Dorian brought bad memories and scared them. Although they considered removing the plastic from the greenhouse roofs at the time, they waited and tracked the storm, which assisted them to make a decision not to remove the roof, an expensive operation.

Management/Leadership Considerations

Bolman and Deal's (2013) developed a set of leadership frames (structural frame, human resources frame, political frame, and symbolic frame; see: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/WC/WC35400.pdf>). For the purposes of this case study, we will consider the situation faced by the Garlands with their newly purchased business through the frames. First, consider individual and family financial planning in general, then financial planning for a natural disaster as a family, and then move on to financial planning for a natural disaster as a business owner.

- Structural – What changes do you recommend in organizational structure for improving preparation for and the likelihood of recovery and minimization of damages after a natural disaster? How might going from an employee to an owner/operator change the family finances? Consider the risk management process and evaluate the need for business insurance. How might you plan for running a business without insurance?
- Human Resources – What human resource related lessons were learned preparing for and recovering from Hurricane Irma?
- Political – Considerations related to improving relationships with outside organizations and customers? What local supports were provided or could be considered?
- Symbolic – How did the change in ownership affect the business? How did the Garlands manage the financial uncertainties about the business following the disaster? How might experiencing a natural disaster change family finances?

Combined

- How can these lessons learned inform future disaster preparedness planning and overall financial planning for both families and businesses?
- What capabilities/skills do the Garlands now have after experiencing a natural disaster?

Synthesis

- You have just graduated from the University of Florida, and Sundance Orchids and Bromeliads approached you to provide consulting work.
- Develop a proposal for Sundance Orchids and Bromeliads that addresses all questions listed above.

References

Lee County Government. (2018). Irma by the numbers. <https://www.leegov.com/irma/oneyear>

Lee County Government. (2019). Lee County Hurricane Irma After-Action Report. Lee County, Florida.