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East Hanover NJ company 'part of the solution' in BP oil spill

Matrix New World Engineering employees aid wildlife

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EAST HANOVER — A township-based engineering and environmental-services firm recently deployed 40 employees to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico to offer expertise with what the Obama administration has described as the worst environmental disaster the nation has ever faced.

Matrix New World Engineering also has hired an additional 50 marine and wildlife biologists to participate in the work being done in the Gulf.

"There's a lot of people working very hard under grueling conditions," said senior vice president and geologist Dennis Petrocelli, who established the company with his wife, licensed civil engineer Jayne Warne, about 20 years ago.

Petrocelli said his employees are assisting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in conducting biological-impact studies and participating in wildlife rescues in Houma, La. They also are working to devise strategies for spill containment, such as booming (a floating barrier to contain the oil), and cleanup in Mobile, Ala. Everyone is putting in 12-hour days in 95-degree heat with 90-percent humidity, Petrocelli said, but morale is up.

"Everyone wants to help out, chip in and make sure the right thing happens," he said.

Matrix New World Engineering was hired by private industry to deploy to the Gulf, but under contract, it is not allowed to disclose the name of that company. Matrix, which has New Jersey offices in East Hanover, Hoboken, Arizona and Delaware, previously has been hired for other large-scale projects, such as the Trans-Hudson Tunnel and the Second Avenue Subway in New York. The firm also was charged with conducting environmental studies at the World Trade Center site following 9/11.

Alan Parsons, the company's technical director, was deployed to the Gulf at the beginning of June to serve as a field lead for the team stationed in Houma. His crew is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fishery, to rescue heavily oiled birds.

"We have excellent rapport with the agencies," he said. "They treat us — and we treat them — as one of the gang. It's seamless."

Parsons said everyone on his team remembers their "first bird" — the first one they captured for triage. He said the crew feels that those birds have a far greater chance of survival once they have been captured and placed in the rehabilitation program.

"Everyone is very positive about their job, and very aggressive in its pursuit," he said. "We're part of the solution. The oil spill happened and we have an opportunity to make a significant impact. It gives

you great satisfaction to know that you can do that."

The team ventures out in open boats with small canopies to find the most heavily oiled birds floating in open water or along the shoreline. The conditions are difficult, with temperatures on shore consistently hovering in the mid-90s, a blazing sun and no breeze coming off the water. Despite the heat and long hours, Parsons described his crew as energetic and positive.

"This is their life blood, and they're passionate about protecting the animals," he said. "So when they're out there, they're doing their best."
