



In a scant two years, the eyes of much of the world will be focused on Virginia, as it celebrates its 400th anniversary...really the anniversary of the birth of the nation. And, while the series of celebratory events takes place under an umbrella organization known as Jamestown 2007, its abundantly clear that Chesterfield County plays a large role in the history of the United States, right from the very start.

With that in mind, Chesterfield Living Magazine, with this issue, begins an ambitious ten-part series, Countdown to Jamestown – Chesterfield, 2007. We'll be counting down the top ten events in the county's history, events which culminate, as we count back through the years, to the earliest English forays into this area.

Each of these ten events has had a major impact on Chesterfield. Many have impacted the nation as well. We'll be examining these events, one at a time, over the next two and a half years. We'll also be using these pages to tell you about the host of activities which will be held in Chesterfield to commemorate the county's part in the birth and shaping of the nation.

In selecting the ten most important events, we solicited the help of a number of knowledgeable individuals who are very much involved in promoting and preserving the history of Chesterfield. We want to thank each of them for their assistance in helping us in selecting the events and helping us to tell these stories in coming issues.

Our panel of authorities is made up of:

Dennis Farmer – historic specialist for Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation, and chairman of Chesterfield 2007.

Walt Heyer – executive director of Henricus Historical Park

Terry Graham – assistant director of Henricus Historical Park

Brad Hamner – deputy county administrator for Chesterfield

Don Kappel – Public Affairs Director for Chesterfield

Dan Weiskotten – acting director of the Chesterfield Historical Society



One of a number of homes damaged during Hurricane Isabel



#10 2003 – REMEMBERING ISABEL

It had been an unusually wet summer, that summer of 2003. The trees had withstood seven years of near drought-like conditions prior to that summer. That had taken its toll, and, combined with the now water-saturated ground, forebode real problems should a severe storm blow through.

As Chesterfieldians were enjoying an extended weekend on Labor Day, September 1st, 2003, the vast majority were totally

unaware of meteorological events taking place on the other side of the Atlantic. A tropical wave was just beginning to form off the coast of Africa. As it moved westward, it continued to increase in intensity.

On September 6, 2003, the disturbance had reached sufficient strength to be named Tropical Storm Isabel. By the next day, Isabel was a hurricane, and on Thursday, September 11th, the storm had reached Category 5 strength, packing winds in excess of



"Hurricane Isabel has rightly been called the worst natural disaster to ever hit Chesterfield County"

150 miles per hour.

On Sunday, September 14th, four days before Isabel made landfall, **Lynda Price**, coordinator for the county's Emergency Services, was tracking the storm's movement. The next day she activated Chesterfield's Emergency Operation Center. Trained personnel went into action, preparing for the possible effects should the storm continue on its projected path.

When Hurricane Isabel hit the Atlantic Coast on Thursday, the 18th of September, she had been downgraded to a Category 2 storm. Even though she had weakened significantly, the National Weather Service in Wakefield, Virginia observed: "due to the pressure gradient between Isabel and the strong high pressure to the north, sustained tropical storm force winds...with frequent wind gusts approaching and exceeding hurricane force...were observed over an unusually extensive area of North Carolina...Virginia and Maryland."

Chesterfield County residents felt the fury of Isabel on the 18th and 19th, and the aftereffects of its devastation well beyond those two days. In its aftermath, the storm had caused or contributed to the deaths of five county residents, including those of an elderly couple who died of carbon monoxide poisoning from a generator they were running in their basement.

Hundreds of others were forced to seek refuge in county shelters. Additionally, Lynda Price says, "Ninety roads throughout the county were blocked due to downed trees."

Over the next several weeks, the county would spend over \$14 million in debris removal. Between the efforts of county crews, VDOT crews, and Chesterfield residents, nearly a million cubic yards of debris would be removed.

Price says the county still has not fully recovered from the storm, citing delays in receiving federal reimbursement for expenses incurred. But, she says, the county has learned some valuable lessons as a result of Isabel's impact. "We know we need to be more self-sufficient," she says. "...If possible not requiring outside resources."

There may have been stronger storms to have blown through over the past four hundred years. **Daniel Weiskotten**, acting executive director for the Chesterfield Historical Society, says there have been "absolutely unfathomable" storms in the past, such as one that hit in 1760. But, in terms of its impact, Hurricane Isabel has rightly been called the worst natural disaster to ever hit Chesterfield County. "There are many in the county who get frightened every time it rains, now," says Weiskotten. "Just the psychological impact of Isabel will affect the citizens of Chesterfield for years to come." ■

