

## **Katrina blows research team north - Tulane polymer scientists prosper at UMass**

**BY TOM MARSHALL STAFF WRITER**

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**AMHERST** - When Hurricane Katrina barreled through Tulane University last August, it seemed like Wayne Reed's fall research plans were doomed.

A physics professor and 20-year New Orleans resident, Reed had forged new ground in the field of polymer research, developing new instruments that track the nature and development of new chemical compounds. He was about to start a new academic institute, the Tulane Center for Excellence in Polymerization Monitoring.

He and his family fled New Orleans just ahead of the storm on Aug. 28, driving to Texas before eventually holing up in a vacation cottage in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas.

But this was not to be just another hurricane story about families marooned and careers put on hold.

Pulling out his address book, Reed called a friend at the University of Massachusetts, professor David A. Hoagland of the Polymer Science and Engineering Department, and struck gold.

'Shaw Ling Hsu, the department head, said 'Hey, bring your whole work group!' Reed said recently. 'I hadn't, in that moment, expected that I'd actually be able to open a laboratory and open up new avenues of research.'

So the Tulane group - Reed, a postdoctoral research associate, four graduate students, and a small mountain of equipment - moved their entire operation into a lab at UMass.

Before long, Reed's entire family had been accommodated in similar fashion. His wife, Linnette, head of foreign languages at Southern University of New Orleans, was offered a temporary position as lecturer in Spanish literature at Amherst College. His son Alex, a Tulane sophomore, found a free spot at the college for a semester, and son Damien joined Amherst Regional High School as a senior.

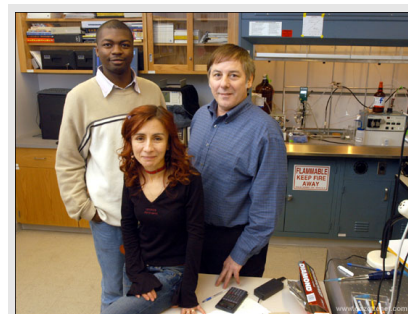
But the opportunity was particularly exciting - and a bit daunting - from a professional point of view.

'At UMass we (were) suddenly surrounded and warmly welcomed by some of the most outstanding polymer scientists in the world, in one of the most well-known and respected polymer research centers,' Reed said. 'This (was) a unique opportunity to put our own advances in the field to the true test.'

Raiding the lab

One by one, the researchers made their way to Amherst in mid-September. Several UMass officials were instrumental in finding places for the graduate students, Reed said, singling out graduate dean John R. Mullin and graduate admissions director Patricia Stowell for praise.

Tulane University continued to pay the salaries of full-time staff members on the team while they were at UMass, Reed added.



**CAROL LOLLIS**

Wayne Reed, a professor of physics at Tulane University, right, stands with Tulane research colleagues Pascal Enohnyaket, a Ph.D. student, and Alina Alb, a postdoctoral associate, in a lab at the University of Massachusetts. All relocated to the Valley after Hurricane Katrina overwhelmed their school.

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But to get much done in terms of research, the group had to return once to Tulane - which was heavily damaged but escaped major flooding in New Orleans - to get more equipment.

'With their permission, we raided the lab,' Reed said, recalling the skeptical glance of his dean as they carted off expensive instruments. 'He looked at me and said, 'Are you ever coming back?'

Companies including Amherst-based Polymer Laboratories Inc., Brookhaven Instruments, Shimadzu Corp., Total and Arkema Inc. also donated or lent equipment and support, he added.

Back at UMass, the Tulane group's knowledge of instrumentation and monitoring immediately filled a gap in the university's polymer research effort, and one of Reed's graduate students has been hired through June to work on a major materials science project funded by the National Science Foundation. Reed's postdoctoral associate, Alina Alb, will also finish the school year at UMass.

'Wayne (and his group) provide an expertise we don't have,' said Thomas Russell, director of the interdepartmental Materials Research Science and Engineering Center.

'This is not hurricane relief,' he added. 'This is an excellent scientific collaboration to help further the MRSEC's mission.'

The team has collaborated with at least a half dozen UMass researchers, helping to study the properties of existing polymers and observe the synthesis of new compounds. Such materials have potential applications in the development of medicines, paints, coatings and moldable plastics.

'We believe we are getting immediate insight into kinetic and photochemical processes occurring during the (chemical) reactions that are simply invisible unless you do this kind of monitoring,' Reed said.

But with the end of the fall term, Reed is now preparing to return to Tulane, which is reopening following a restructuring that will see the elimination of five undergraduate departments and a full 10 percent reduction of its faculty.

All tenured or tenure-track professors are being asked to return, and all instructors and adjuncts have been laid off, he said.

'I would love to stay here (through June), even unpaid,' Reed added. 'But I've been at Tulane for 20 years. I feel I owe it to them to go back this semester and help them through this recovery.'

His wife and son Damien will remain in Amherst for the rest of the school year, while Alex returns to Tulane with his father.

Officials from other Five Colleges institutions said most visiting students from the hurricane-affected region were returning to their home schools this semester. (See accompanying story.)

Plans for Tulane's new polymer center have been put on hold, one of many dreams interrupted last fall by Hurricane Katrina.

But even so, the storm has forged professional links for Reed and his team that would not otherwise have been created.

'This is an opportunity we never would have had,' he said.

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