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Carmel Valley oil exec plans to bring storm victims to San Diego Sunday

By: DENIS DEVINE - Staff Writer

BATON ROUGE, La. ---- Fed up with hearing about agonizingly slow efforts to get relief to the victims of Hurricane Katrina, San Diego businessman David Perez chartered a Lear jet from Carlsbad, Calif., to Baton Rouge on Saturday morning. He brought with him outrage, a few members of the media, a few bags of relief supplies and promises to do much more for the still-suffering victims of the nation's worst natural disaster.

Perez said he plans to bring another chartered jet, this one full of storm victims, Sunday to San Diego, where dozens of families have offered their homes as temporary shelter.

But the oil executive and his rogue mercy mission got off to a difficult start Saturday.

Perez barked pleas and orders into his cell phone in the lobby of Carlsbad's McClellan-Palomar Airport, making frantic phone calls before departing at 9:45 a.m. Saturday.

"I need a tanker of gas to the Baton Rouge Sheriff's Department!" he told his assistant, Ryan Lipkovacious, while scribbling notes outside the airport lobby. "They're all out of fuel! Their SWAT team can't move!"

Perez pledged Friday to pay to fly relief supplies to Louisiana and to bring evacuees back to San Diego County. Frustrated at the slow pace of the relief efforts he had seen on television, the oil company executive contacted Jewish philanthropic organizations looking to donate to the effort.

But he said that when National Guard officials couldn't tell him who was in charge, he decided to get much more personally involved. Frenetically working his cell phone Saturday morning, Perez juggled calls to emergency managers, state senators and hospital officials in Louisiana. He made calls to people around the country that he had enlisted to contribute to his wildcat relief effort.

At times, his anger and lack of sleep came to a boil.

"FEMA never showed up," he told a few reporters at the Carlsbad airport, his voice rising. "How did I get these phone calls? Who am I? Why aren't they calling the government?"

"I'm out there looking for water, fuel, food ---- for publicly elected officials!" he seethed, before shouting into a TV camera: "Bush, get off your ass and get to work!"

Then he and pilots for Executive Jet Services went to work, loading supplies Perez had bought at Costco ---- tampons, toothbrushes, energy bars, bottled water and bandages and other essentials ---- onto the small private jet.

Perez said he had already paid \$100,000 toward the effort, but expected the total cost to rise to \$250,000 if he

fulfilled his pledge to bring 150 refugees back to San Diego County.

After 23 years in telecommunications, Perez has served as chief operating officer at Carmel Valley-based Surge Global Energy for about a year.

He said he was counting on one of his company's drilling operations to pay his credit card bills for the relief effort, or else he would have to take out a second mortgage on his San Diego home.

But he was clearly not content with merely contributing money.

"Everybody wants money," he said. "They don't want food or help," he said. "But I don't want to give money and have it sit there. I'm on the ground to get food to the people."

Perez, who upon landing in Baton Rouge talked his way onto a rescue helicopter that took him to New Orleans, later said he was working with the Louisiana Social Services Department to identify storm victims for the planned evacuation to San Diego.

He said he planned to have a list of names of evacuees making the trip by late Saturday night, and that assistants in San Diego were coordinating housing for the storm victims.

A local spokeswoman for the Red Cross, which did not sanction or ask for Perez's help, said Saturday that the Red Cross would be ready to assist with evacuees if they show up in San Diego.

As of Saturday night, Perez had a jet with room for more than 150 evacuees chartered to leave from Baton Rouge Monday.

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