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Locals caught in wrath of Hurricane Wilma in Cancun

By [MARK MAJOR](#)

When Westerville area residents Joe and Terri Mayerhofer climbed aboard a Cancun-bound plane Oct. 15, they expected to spend a week at the beachside Royal Resorts, enjoying the sun and sampling the fare at their favorite restaurants.

Instead, they spent five days of their annual vacation weathering Hurricane Wilma and its aftermath, holed up in an elementary school classroom with 26 other refugees from the resort, sleeping on chairs and desks and dining on spam and tuna.

The resort moved the Mayerhofers and about 170 other visitors 20 miles inland to the Escuela Primeria Plutarco Elias Calles in Cancun's district 103 on Oct. 20, Mrs. Mayerhofer said.

When they saw their new digs, it was quite a shock, the couple said.

"It was very intimidating," Mr. Mayerhofer said. "It was hard to imagine anybody went to school in that room."

"It was deplorable," said Mrs. Mayerhofer. "But everybody pulled together -- nobody broke down."

The Mayerhofers and their 26 roommates dined on canned meats, crackers and water provided by the Mexican government, they said -- a far cry from the steak, lobster and Italian food they had expected to enjoy.

When the weather cleared, the Mayerhofers and their new friends were returned to the relative luxury of their resort rooms, though they were without electricity, water and plumbing for the remainder of their stay, they said.

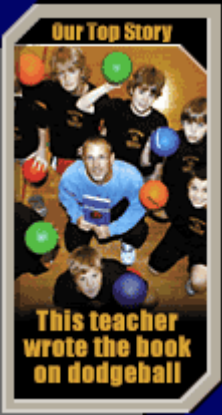
"We had candles. We played cards. We had more Spam and crackers," Mrs. Mayerhofer recalled Tuesday. "There were people from Ireland and Canada. They'd sing songs, they'd do cheers. It was neat."

The Mayerhofers finally made it out of Mexico Thursday, landing in Dallas that evening. Many on board the flight had waited as long as the Mayerhofers to go home, they said.

"When we got ready to take off, people laughed, people cried," Mrs. Mayerhofer said. "It was good."



Terri Mayerhofer and Luis Ferdinand, director of the Escuela Primeria Plutarco Elias Calles, where the Mayerhofer and her husband Joe spent five days last month weathering hurricane Wilma and its aftermath. The Mayerhofers shared a classroom with 26 other tourists also displaced by the hurricane from their beachside accommodations at Royal Resorts.



The experience gave Mrs. Mayerhofer an appreciation for the poverty suffered by many Mexicans, she said.

"We were leaving, but they had to live in those conditions," she said. "My husband tells me from now on I better not throw out the heels of bread anymore. It really makes you think."

Overall, the couple said their vacation wasn't as relaxing as it could have been.

"On a scale of 1 to 10, I would say it was a 1," Mr. Mayerhoffer said.

"I told Joe this morning, 'I need a vacation to recover from our vacation,'" Mrs. Mayerhofer said.

When they are not setting up housekeeping in Mexican grammar schools, the Mayerhofers live on Breshly Way, located near Central College and Harlem roads, with Mrs. Mayerhofer's children Andrew, 16, and Addie, 14.



Stranded tourists at the Royal Resorts in Cancun spell out a message with beach towels on the top of the facility: "HELP ... SEND PLANES!"