



# Squad Goals

## Jane Kelsey led her local EMT squad through two major hurricanes

BY ROB KALESSE



**Jane Kelsey**

PARTNER, WEBER GALLAGHER

PERSONAL INJURY - MEDICAL MALPRACTICE: DEFENSE; INSURANCE COVERAGE

BEDMINSTER

New Jersey was dealt back-to-back blows in 2011 and 2012, when hurricanes ravaged the state. First came Irene, which inflicted about \$5 billion in damage, making it the state's costliest disaster. Sandy unseated that dubious honor about a year later, racking up \$30 billion in damage and economic loss. For lovers of the Jersey Shore, the image of the hunk of mangled steel that was once the Star Jet roller coaster in Seaside Heights—which Sandy casually tossed into the ocean—is a haunting reminder of the coast's vulnerability.

As both storms loomed, lawyer and EMT Jane Kelsey was packed and ready.

Kelsey, with Weber Gallagher, grew up in a doctor's office. Her home in Metuchen doubled as a medical practice, which her M.D. father ran with her nurse mother.

"I recall wearing scrubs and carrying around a toy medical bag, and on occasion, my father would bring me to the hospital on his rounds," says Kelsey. "At Thanksgiving, it was a family tradition to line up around the table after our meal for our annual flu shots."

While a career in medicine wasn't Kelsey's calling, she found her way back to it: She joined a boutique medical malpractice firm, where doctors and nurses were her clients.

"The fact that I defend doctors and medical professionals may be a conversation best saved for Freud," says Kelsey. "I wanted to do something that made an impact. I feel like what I do—protecting the protectors—has an impact."

That's also why she became an EMT. Certified in 2006, she joined the Berkeley Heights Volunteer Rescue Squad before transferring to the Warren Township Rescue Squad, where she eventually became training officer and first lieutenant.

Then came Irene and Sandy. As each storm made landfall, the squad chiefs that would have been running operations were stuck out of town. Kelsey was designated as acting chief. Twice.

"As storms like those make their way up the East Coast, you prepare yourself by packing a bag and coordinating with the local and county offices of emergency management, other first responders and the public agencies in town," says Kelsey.

Kelsey and her rescue colleagues had to triage critical issues: What happens if the winds gain so much speed that EMT vehicles can't travel? How do we get oxygen to people with breathing devices dependent on electricity? When would highways close?

"People don't realize what goes on behind the scenes of a major event like a hurricane," she says.

While both storms presented danger, it was Sandy that threatened Warren Township's fuel, food and water supplies.

"This is a small town of about 15,000, but we are on top of a mountain; so when trees go down, road access in and out of town becomes a major issue," says Kelsey. "For two weeks, the supermarkets were bare. Gas stations were dry. Volunteers lost power for a week and had to live out of the squad building. Fortunately, we planned ahead, hand-delivered what we could, and suffered no fatalities."

At the end of 2018, she stepped down from her EMT post, although she serves as a consultant.

Once word got out that she was retiring, Warren Mayor Carolann Garafola presented Kelsey with the Outstanding Service to the Community Award.

"When the mayor called me into a town meeting and presented me a plaque, it was an honor," says Kelsey. "But the reality is that this is what our incredible first responders do every day." **SL**



Kelsey, standing, fourth from right, with her Warren Township squad.