



Everything New Orleans

CNN's Anderson Cooper is back in New Orleans to cover yet another disaster: the oil spill

Published: Thursday, July 01, 2010, 8:14 PM



The Times-Picayune

By Matt Davis, contributing writer



Michael DeMocker, The Times-Picayune

'This is the longest I've spent in one place covering one story,' CNN's Anderson Cooper said. 'Just the scale of it, the time frame. Normally you'll have one event happen and then the aftermath, but here the disaster is ongoing. I can't imagine being anywhere else.'

A crowd of about 40 people watched raptly on a recent night as **Anderson Cooper**, the blue-eyed heartthrob of CNN fame in town to cover **the Gulf oil spill**, stood against the backdrop of the Crescent City Connection and prepped for his shot.

Perhaps the most well-known cable television reporter in the country, Cooper repeated his line several times using different intonations, until he got it just right.

"It's Day 67 of the catastrophe that has devastated the Gulf, devastated the region and left thousands out of work," Cooper began.

Ralph Del Ciotto, on vacation from Atlanta with his partner, David Gregory, sat on the grass in Woldenberg Park, enthralled. "He repeats himself so much so he gets it right," he said.

Del Ciotto giggled with another Cooper fan, Cathy Parnell, on vacation from Peach Tree City, Ga. Parnell's husband stood in the back with Gregory, both men looking bemused.

"I knew he was here because I watch him every night and I recognized the bridge," Cathy Parnell said.

Her husband chimed in: "She just kept saying, 'That's the bridge, that's the bridge.'"

News media descend on New Orleans

For the second time in less than five years, New Orleans is playing host to a disaster watched around the globe, with the world's biggest media outlets setting up shop to broadcast images of misery. Woldenberg Park has become an outdoor studio of sorts for them, with anchors and reporters from ABC and Al Jazeera and everything between filming standups in the shadow of the Westin Hotel and Harrah's New Orleans Casino, against the bridge's distinctive silhouette.

The most consistent presence is Cooper, who became a local media darling during Hurricane Katrina and has returned often since. Dozens gather to watch him shoot prerecorded segments of his show and film live broadcasts.

"Please, no flash photography," said the show's producer, Ismael Estrada, as Cooper rehearsed his introductions in the dark, illuminated by three CNN lights and a few flash bulbs.

Cooper forged ahead.

"Suicide is a difficult thing, and no one can ever judge the forces that lead to it," said Cooper, referring to the suicide a day earlier of William Allen Kruse, an Alabama boat captain despondent over the oil spill. "The concern is that he won't be the last."

'I am watching Anderson Cooper put on bug spray'

Behind him, the Natchez paddleboat let out a series of blasts on its calliope, forcing the crew to reshoot several segments. No one in the audience seemed to mind.

"I am watching Anderson Cooper putting on bug spray in front of the Natchez in New Orleans," typed Arizona physician Michelle Doroz, into her Facebook page.

"I'm sending a message to my sister," she said. "She's a big Anderson Cooper fan, but she's in Israel right now on a tour of the Middle East."

Doroz came down after spotting Cooper's camera crew setting up their shot from the rooftop of the Westin.

"Does he live here?" she asked. "I'm drawn to him because he seems like a normal person. I watch him on Oprah, and the women like him, too. At least my sister does. She's got a big thing for him."

'He could be the mayor of New Orleans'

"Anderson Cooper has done a lot for New Orleans," said Tom Naylor, a disc jockey at local radio station WEZB-FM, drinking a beer. "He was here before Katrina, he was here afterward. He could be the mayor of New Orleans, honestly, he's so popular with the people down here."

Plaquemines Parish President Billy Nungesser joined Cooper on the air, sporting a white parish cap. Nungesser, who has been almost as omnipresent as Cooper during the disaster, has seen his entourage swell recently too, to include a writer from a national magazine, who took copious notes on Nungesser's performance.

After his segment was complete, Nungesser was effusive about Cooper.



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'Every single night we reiterate the point that New Orleans is open for business,' Cooper said.

"I think he was critical in getting the president down here," Nungesser said. "When I met with the president in Grand Isle, he said, 'If you've got a problem call me, don't call Anderson Cooper. If you call me and I can't fix it, then you go on Anderson Cooper.'"

Nungesser has been on Cooper's show more than 10 times in the past month.

Cooper wrapped up his show shortly after 10 p.m. to a round of applause from the crowd. Dressed in a blue

shirt with the sleeves rolled up, he spent time posing for photographs and talking with the crowd.

"I have a regular pair of steel toe boots from Walmart," he said, when asked about his incongruously casual sneakers. "They get a little uncomfortable by the evening so I change into the sneakers. But if people are paying too much attention to my footwear, then I'm doing something wrong."

Digging in for the story

Cooper often spends extended time on location after a disaster -- a month in New Orleans after Katrina, three-and-a-half weeks in Haiti after the January earthquake.

"This is the longest I've spent in one place covering one story," he said. "Just the scale of it, the time frame. Normally you'll have one event happen and then the aftermath, but here the disaster is ongoing. I can't imagine being anywhere else."

The Woldenberg reports haven't pleased everyone. Steve Perry, president of the city's Convention and Visitors Bureau, recently told a local reporter that Cooper's presence in Woldenberg Park -- with the distinctive cityscape in the background -- "sends a message to the world that associates [New Orleans with the disaster unfolding on the coast] by inference."

"I don't think he's been watching," Cooper said. "Every single night we reiterate the point that New Orleans is open for business, and I've interviewed Lenny Kravitz on that point, and Terence Blanchard. I get that concern, I understand the frustration, but frankly I don't think those people are paying attention to the broadcasts."

Stefan MaGee, a registered nurse who paints under the name Doké, offered Cooper a couple of oil-themed T-shirts he had just printed. One said "New Oileans," in squidgy black letters. Another showed a cartoon drawing of a fish's skeleton, covered in tar balls.

"I can't accept gifts," said Cooper, asking MaGee how much they cost.

"Oh, it's all right," MaGee replied. "I'll accept a photo with you, that would be fine."

Cooper pressed the point, giving MaGee \$40 from his wallet for two shirts, and posed for a photo.

"I couldn't believe it," MaGee said afterward. "He bought the first ones I've sold."