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Sandy ranks as historic storm: weather experts

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By PATRICIA KITCHEN patricia.kitchen@newsday.com

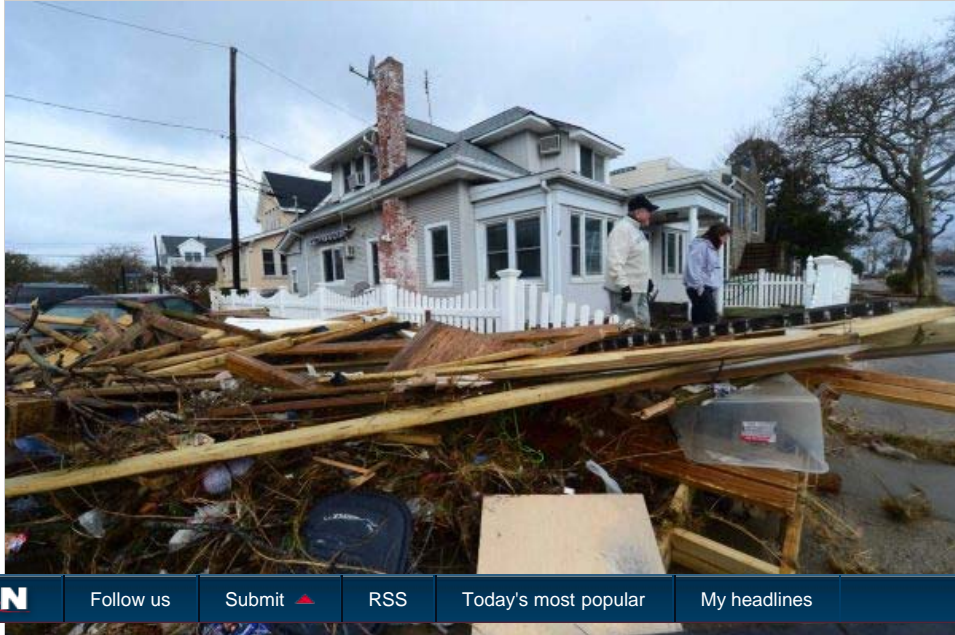



Photo credit: Newsday / Alejandra Villa | The aftermath of superstorm Sandy in Long Beach. (Oct. 30, 2012)

Videos



The superstorm Sandy will take a prominent place in the pantheon of nor'easters and powerful hybrid systems that have taken significant swipes at Long Island, weather experts said.

The onetime hurricane morphed into a post-tropical cyclone as it hit Long Island. And eventually it became a "nor'easter on steroids," according to Meghan McPherson, manager of Adelphi University's emergency management graduate program.


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Through it all, Sandy was a storm of historic proportions -- in terms of storm surge and the unusual track it took. But other such systems have had their way with the region.

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Take the Dec. 11-13, 1992, storm remembered for, among other things, breaching the barrier at Southampton's Dune Road, isolating 180 homes. Like Sandy, that storm was slow-moving, taking two days to creep up the coast from Cape Hatteras, N.C., to southern New York, said Brian Colle, professor of atmospheric science at Stony Brook University.

Sandy ultimately speeded up, making it slightly shorter in duration. There was a jump from 12 mph to 28 mph Monday, said Tim Morrin, meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Upton.

Like Sandy, the 1992 storm also hit at full moon, meaning supersized storm surges, Colle said.

Sandy may have been the winner, however, in terms of wind speed. Some gusts reached 90 mph in Islip during the height of the storm.

While the 1992 storm was a classic nor'easter, the storm of Oct. 30, 1991, was more like Sandy, Colle said: a hybrid.

That "perfect storm" of 1991 became destined for history books when a developing storm off the coast of New England absorbed what was left of what was once Hurricane Grace. That, in turn, looped around off Montauk, resulting in significant damage to the East End.

Unlike that scenario, said Morrin, Sandy was still a potent storm when she met up with a "vigorous trough of low pressure" driven by the jet stream from the north.

The classic nor'easter that hit Long Island on Ash Wednesday in March 1962 was also slow-moving, parking for a few days in the mid-Atlantic and "pounding the coast," Colle said, and Long Islanders found themselves on the north side of the storm. That's where winds are fiercer and, blowing easterly, pull water toward the coast, he said.

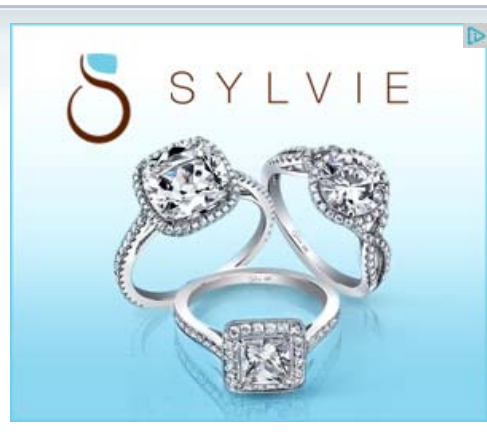
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