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Charlie Jimerson lost a lot during Irma, but has renewed faith in his team

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Three days after Hurricane Irma ripped across Jacksonville, [Charlie Jimerson](#) sent an email seeking two things: referrals for temporary office space -- and referrals for a temporary place to live.

During the storm, the flooding St. Johns River poured into Jimerson's Ortega home, requiring the Jacksonville attorney to trudge through chest-high water with his children on his back.

The storm destroyed his house, his car and about 90 percent of his possessions.

And it also knocked out the [Wells Fargo Center](#) where his law firm, Jimerson & Cobb employs 25 people.

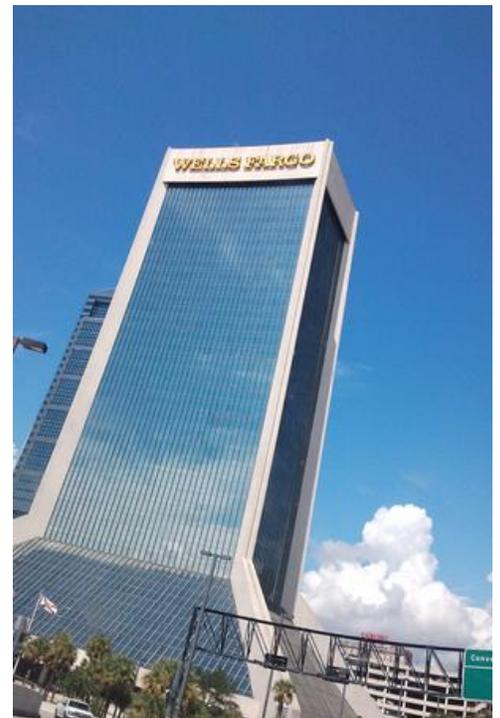
The fourth largest office building in Jacksonville has yet to reopen to tenants, with some starting to search for temporary office space.

On Tuesday, the building's property management team, [Banyan Street Capital](#), notified tenants that -- although some have speculated it may take months to restore the building to normal operations -- electricity had been turned back on in every suite.

Despite the progress being made on building restoration, there's still many other obstacles that must be overcome before the building can open to tenants. A definitive timeline for when tenants will be able to return to the building has yet to be communicated.

[Matthew Clark](#), a vice president of property brokerage at Prime Realty, started offering short term leases at 100 N. [Laura Street](#) and some smaller suites in the Elks Building, also on [Laura Street](#), for anyone displaced by the storm.

He said that while many people initially reached out to him about space, so far, the spaces still remain available. Clark, who often represents landlords in negotiations, said while he already pays close attention to calamity clauses during lease negotiations, the [Wells Fargo](#) situation may make him pay even closer attention.



JAMES CRICHLOW

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Those clauses will govern what happens to displaced tenants in the tower.

David T. Abraham, a real estate attorney with the St. Johns Law Group, said that typically owners have as few as 120 days and as many as 270 days to restore a building to operations after a catastrophic event like the one experienced by the Wells Fargo Center.

Also, because the weather event would be considered "an act of God," it's likely that the landlord will not be considered liable for loss of productivity, Abraham said.

In most calamities, tenants will not be required to pay their base rent, Abraham said, although passthrough expenses tacked onto rent may not be abated.

"As a tenant, you look to your lease and you see what your casualty provision is," he said.

As for Jimerson, he's focused on helping his team work remotely while waiting for their office to re-open. Arguably, he said, his firm has been more productive as many are working from home.

"I think it's a testament to our planning as well as the resolve of our team," he said. "We are very flexible."

That's one silver lining Jimerson said he experienced through this catastrophe. After he sent that email seeking help, the support that came back his way was overwhelming.

"People I have barely shaken their hand reached out," he said.

More than 350 emails flooded his inbox.

"This is a great town," he said. "There are some wonderful people in this city that are willing to step up."

Derek Gilliam

Reporter

Jacksonville Business Journal

