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LOPC Members Help Joplin Victims Rebuild

Submitted by Bobbie Dodson

Thirty four members of the Adult Mission Team from Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church (LOPC) volunteered 1,440 hours of work during the week of May 5-12 helping build houses in Joplin, Missouri, the town which suffered extreme tornado damage in May of 2011.

The category E5 twister, struck at 5:32 p.m. leaving a path of destruction, nearly a mile wide and six miles long, through the town. Some 8,000 homes and 400 businesses were destroyed; 4,500 jobs affected; 1,550 residents injured; and 162 lives were lost in just 32 minutes. Nearly a year later the long scar remained. While some new homes graced the flat, rocky, green landscape it was mostly a wasteland of concrete foundations and still some debris of damaged homes, with the nine-story St. John's Hospital building standing tall, but unusable because it had been moved four inches off its foundation by the 200 mph wind.

The LOPC team, men and women, worked on four new homes accomplishing such tasks as installing house wrap and siding, finishing interiors with molding, sealing tile, sanding sheetrock, putting in Prego flooring, and painting. An older home was gutted, including tearing out a chimney, and the rebuilding began.

Listening to the stories of the owners, the team learned some of the terror they endured. Amy and Larry Jump, with their three boys, barely made it into their basement where it sounded like a freight train was rumbling over them.

When they emerged all that was left of their home was a pile of bricks and broken studs. They learned that a car which landed on their gas meter had been blown from the hospital parking lot, nearly a mile away.

Taking refuge in her laundry room because it had no windows, which made it safer than most rooms, Stevi Andron came out to find it was the only thing left standing. Betty and Mel Brownsberger sheltered 13 people in their basement while their home above was being blown away.

All the homeowners expressed their gratitude to the volunteers over and over again. Brownsberger said, "We didn't wait for help, and started working right away but having people like you come is a Godsend."

Volunteers continue to arrive from throughout the United States and foreign countries as well. Knowing there will still be much work to be done the LOPC team plans to return in 2013, Rev. John Weems, the group's leader, explained. Also, this summer he will accompany the high school group when they travel to Joplin to add their efforts to the rebuilding of the town.

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