



January, 2016

A MONTHLY MESSAGE
FROM



**MAYOR
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Together, We Are Rowlett Strong!

On December 26, 2015 around 7:00pm CST, Rowlett, Texas was hit by an EF4 Tornado, whose path was almost four miles long and 1/2 mile wide.

1,145 homes and businesses were impacted.

23 individuals were injured, one of whom later passed away.

My fellow Rowlett citizens,

Going out into our community after the tornado was a very sobering experience, the damage done is significant and the road to recovery ahead of us will be long. The past few weeks have been absolutely amazing. More people donating than I could ever have imagined, our local businesses continue to give with no end in sight, organizations from all over the country setting up shop to help the people of Rowlett. Churches all over the City opening their doors to help, regardless of the denomination or background, turning their churches into donation centers and shelters. Thousands of volunteers descending upon this community to assist those impacted. 47 agencies and municipalities from all over sending manpower and equipment to help out our amazing City staff. Oncor and Atmos teams working around the clock to ensure we had power and gas services restored as soon as possible. More food donated to feed all of those working and all of those displaced than you could possibly imagine. The emergency services agencies, such as Lakepointe Medical Center, offering free services in the form of a health clinic at the Rowlett Community Centre, and later at First Christian Church, giving tetanus and flu shots along with general checkups in case there is an injury. The outpouring of love and services is astounding, the generosity shown our community is indescribable.

We have made significant strides in our cleanup effort. Over 120,000 cubic yards of debris have been cleared from our streets and right-of-ways to allow residents and emergency services access back into the affected neighborhoods. Rowlett, has always been a very special city to me and

the love, comfort and support that has been provided to help us get back on our feet has now far exceeded any possible expectation. I continue to pray for comfort and healing for all of those who have been impacted in the days ahead and I've heard from many about what a caring community this is, the amount of support, folks are so moved at the over-abundance of people flooding this community with assistance and offers to help. The devastation is wide. We have over 1,100 homes impacted in some way, and somewhere in the area of 500 of those will likely be a total loss. But without the incredible efforts of your City staff, along with the tireless work by countless volunteers and relief organizations, our community would not be nearly as far along in our recovery efforts. The churches who have flung open their doors, supplies and services offered by our businesses, the neighbors helping neighbors... some of whom have lived on the same street for years and never even met have now established lifelong relationships.

I cannot thank all of the citizens, all of the businesses, all of the organizations, the City staff, and the resources that have poured into our City for all of their help and hard work. We've got a long road ahead of us, I'm not going to kid you. But we've made significant progress. I will tell you that we will be here, I will be here, for as long as it takes to provide assistance so that we can move forward as a City.

***We will get through this together as a community. I truly believe that we will be stronger and closer than ever before.
We are Rowlett Strong.***



Thank You to our Community Organizations...



Community Emergency Response Team

50 Rowlett Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members responded and were staged within an hour, setting up a command center inside the Rowlett Community Centre. CERT organizations from EastTex, Sachse and all of the mutual aid CERT program partners then responded. Almost 280 CERT members representing 22 CERT programs came to the aid of Rowlett citizens, braving the cold, driving rain, trudging through mud and debris to assist with search and rescue operations and to complete a windshield type damage assessment. In the days following the tornado, Rowlett CERT members walked the debris field day after day, handing out water, supplies and information to those still in their homes without power.

Please know that your service is valued and not taken for granted.

Keep Rowlett Beautiful

KRB held a special document shredding and electronic recycling event on January 9 at Rowlett High School, just to ensure affected residents had a way to safely dispose of debris as they cleaned up their homes.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors...

In the moments following a disaster, such as the EF4 tornado that hit Rowlett on December 26, 2015, first responders can quickly become overwhelmed with calls for help. Our Rowlett community really pulled together on that evening, with neighbors helping neighbors in many cases when access to areas presented a challenge and every moment counted for those trapped in the debris that once was their home. This is just one of those stories.

During the tornado, Bruce Hargrave and Sammy Walker each took shelter in their own homes, Bruce and wife Cathy in their laundry room, Sammy and his family in the 10x10 tornado shelter he had previously built in his garage. Once it had passed, they came out to survey the damage and make sure neighbors on Willowbrook Drive were all ok and accounted for.

Hearing calls for help across the street, they ran to neighbor Barbara Griffith's home, which was severely impacted. Her adult son, along with other neighbors, were attempting to free Barbara and her brother, Neil Heslop. Uninjured, Barbara was able to make her way out of the room she was semi-trapped in. However, Neil was trapped inside under about two feet of debris, which included brick and mortar. Sammy, Bruce and the others, which included Sammy's son Daniel Walker and son in law Travis Griswold, dug Neil from the rubble. Neil was in shock and had several noticeable severe injuries, among them an obvious compound fracture of his arm,

including arterial bleeding. A neighbor who is a nurse used Bruce's belt as a tourniquet and slowed the bleeding. At that point, first responders arrived on foot, they were unable to drive into the area due to all the debris so they grabbed their medical bags and response equipment and hiked in. They stabilized Neil and installed him on a backboard, then loaded him

into the back of Sammy's SUV, radioing ahead to Lake Pointe Medical Center. Sammy and Bruce, along with Barbara and her son, raced him to the hospital, driving over storm debris and downed power lines and dodging around congested traffic stalled by the storm by traveling on roadsides and over medians, flattening all four tires in the process. When they arrived at Lake Point, the hospital was itself overwhelmed with those injured, but Sammy, an Olympic weight lifter who also competed in shotput and discus, was able to demonstrate that Neil's injuries were such that getting him to another hospital would not be an option.



Sammy Walker and Bruce Hargrave were recognized by proclamation at the January 19 City Council Meeting.

Both Mr. Hargrove and Mr. Walker have expressed that they did not do anything out of the ordinary, nothing that anyone else wouldn't do and in fact what their whole neighborhood DID do, that they just each had a pair of hands and a willing heart.

Mr. Heslop passed away at Parkland Hospital on Sunday, January 10 due to complications from his injuries.

North Texas Neighbors Helping Neighbors...

The Garland Independent School District responded immediately. Steadham Elementary School was opened as a Red Cross temporary shelter. Then, in the week following the tornado, before children returned to school, GISD mounted a huge communication effort to get in touch with families to ensure student's transportation, school supplies, and clothing needs were met. So many families were displaced in communities all over north Texas and GISD was not about to let the children suffer any more stress, it was imperative that they have at least a small sense of "normalcy" by way of returning to THEIR school, THEIR classrooms and teachers, and THEIR friends. *Way to go, GISD!*

Our North Texas neighboring communities have also demonstrated their outpouring of love and support for those affected by the tornado. At the January 19 City Council Meeting, Flower Mound Mayor Tom Hayden, along with Police Chief Andy Kancel and Fire Chief Eric Greaser, presented over \$8,300 in gift cards collected from Flower Mound citizens who wanted to help.



Thank you so very much, Flower Mound!

Local businesses have shown their support in many, many ways. Thank you ALL for being such amazing community partners!

Rowlett Business Community ROCKS!



The Home Depot donated supplies for the response effort and organized staff groups to volunteer and assist residents.



Rowlett Gold and Silver auctioned off a 3-carat diamond ring to raise \$640!



Chick-Fil-A was onsite almost immediately with warm food for first responders, volunteers and Lake Point Hospital staff. In fact, for the first time in their history, they opened on Sunday to continue that effort.



Raising Canes held a spirit night at their Rowlett and Rockwall stores, 100% of their sales (not PROCEEDS, but the actual SALES) were donated. \$36,518 in one evening!



Spirit Outfitters has designed a powerful "Rebuild Rowlett" logo and is selling shirts and auto decals as a fundraiser.

Just a few of the many others who have provided more support that I thought possible!

Dickey's BBQ
Hubbard's
Kyoto
Opa
McCallister's Deli
Scooter's Coffee
Walmart
Operation BBQ

Premier Vet Care
First Step Chiropractic
DART
Chili's
Frito-Lay
Napolis
Uhaul
Black Tie Moving

Advantage Storage
Regency Roofing
ASSI Gymnastics
Tom Thumb
Forever Floors
24 Hour Fitness
Anytime Fitness
Lifetime Fitness

Mr. Jim's Pizza
Sammee's Pizza Ghatti
Jimmy John's
Moe's Southwest Grill
The Original Pancake House
The Track
Burger Island

Golden Eagle Roofing
Animal Hospital of Rowlett
Palio's
Dunkin Donuts
Hot Diggity Dog Grooming
Body Enhancement Spa
Barrett Motors
Jordan's Goodyear

I am completely humbled by the incredible response by our community's churches.

This tornado did not pick a specific race, religion, socio-economic background, it impacted EVERYONE. And our churches responded. The doors were flung open, volunteers and donations organized those affected were provided WHATEVER assistance needed, be it shelter, financial, supplies, hot meals, laundry service, showers, counseling,

Rowlett Churches Take Care Of Us All!

clothing, the list goes on and on. The level of care and compassion shown to those affected by this disaster by our church community is unprecedented and I will NEVER be able to thank them enough. I've long said it, but here I go again: *Rowlett is a truly blessed community.*

*First Christian Church Rowlett
First United Methodist Church
First Baptist Church
Church in the City
C3 Church*

*Crossroads Church
Life Message
Cornerstone Church
Lakepointe Church
Firewheel Church*

*Holy Trinity by the Lake
Mt. Hebron
Zion Baptist
Stillwater Community Church
Lighthouse Baptist*

