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Storm brings out North Side strengths

Article by: KAREN KELLEY-ARIWOOLA Updated: June 5, 2011 - 7:55 PM

After the tornado, the community is proceeding with resilience and a vision of what it can become.



Volunteers at N. Penn Ave. 2500 block in North Minneapolis. 2,000 volunteers registered to assist in the North Side tornado cleanup.

Photo: Jim Gehrz, The Star Tribune
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Years spent watching reruns of "The Wizard of Oz" could not have prepared me for the tornado that hit Minneapolis on May 22.

Unlike the tornado that hit Kansas (Dorothy and Toto are shown floating through the air in slow motion) the tornado that Minneapolis' North Side was fast and furious. And what remained after the tragedy was a path of destruction that defies description.

Many of my fellow North Siders have lost their homes, businesses and, in two cases, their lives.

While the media has carried much about the destruction, not enough has been said about the outpouring of support and the capacity of people to pull together and create a new North Side that embodies vitality.

Everyone has their tornado story, and mine is a story of chance. I had just brought one son home and was leaving to pick up the other when I decided to run back into the house.

In those brief minutes, the wind picked up, the house rumbled, and the impact of what seemed like a million trees was upon us. As we ventured out into the neighborhood, the images of trees snapped in half and uprooted like pesky weeds left us speechless.

Along with our neighbors, we began to check on one another -- going door to door, block after block -- hugging and expressing joy that everyone was OK. Because I couldn't get out of my driveway, friends

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picked up my son and hung around to help move trees.

At one point we were joined by a man from Minnetonka who just showed up with a saw and helped clear the street. Without missing a beat, people were helping each other at every turn.

In my role at the Minneapolis Foundation, I've witnessed messages of compassion and an outpouring of contributions from thousands of people through the MN Helps-North Minneapolis Recovery Fund, established in partnership with the Greater Twin Cities United Way and [GiveMN.org](#). Those contributions are already making a huge difference -- we're inspired and so grateful.

But what of the people who call north Minneapolis home? As a group, we are often portrayed as poor, dependent, violent, uneducated -- the list goes on. Sometimes we hear this directly, but more often it's implied.

Certainly the hardest hit areas of the North Side align with where some of Minneapolis' greatest economic poverty exists. Those areas and impacted families and individuals (especially displaced and uninsured renters) deserve our focused support and resources.

But as I walked the streets in the hours after the tornado, I was reminded of the diversity of the North Side: I encountered people of all races and ethnicities and faiths; homeowners and renters; lawyers and nurses; single moms, retirees and families; people with wealth and those without.

While the North Side has more than its share of social ills, those conditions do not define the people or the institutions here. And in the days since the storm, North Siders have lead the recovery effort.

- Faith groups like Shiloh Temple, New Salem Missionary Baptist Church, Sanctuary Covenant Church, Church of the Ascension, Kwanzaa Community Church and Masjid An-Nur have collected essential items, served thousands of meals and ministered to the needs of people.
- Groups like Urban Homeworks and students from Summit Academy OIC have removed brush and patched countless homes.
- Nonprofits like Northside Achievement Zone, Northpoint Health and Wellness, Pillsbury United, Phyllis Wheatley, the Urban League, the YMCA, the Plymouth Christian Youth Center, MAD DADS and others have hit the ground running with case management and services to families.
- Businesses like Thor Construction have organized minority contractors and provided repair to homes.
- Schools like Harvest Prep have opened their doors to displaced students.
- Community leaders and activists organized a Northside Community Response Team to create a tangible and flexible infrastructure that has responded to the short-term emergency and is prepared to engage in the long-term rebuilding of the community.

This effort is complemented by the amazing work of the city, Hennepin County, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Greater Twin Cities United Way, Minneapolis public schools, Minneapolis Parks and Recreation, businesses, philanthropic organizations, nonprofits and countless volunteers.

While it's my nature to view the world through a glass-half-full perspective, I know there are challenges. But as the tornado relief work shifts from emergency response to long-term recovery, the broader community needs to know that there is strong capacity on the North Side, with a group of committed people who have a vision for what this community can become.

North Siders already know what it took Dorothy a trip to Oz to figure out: There is no wizard.

The courage, brains and heart to rebuild north Minneapolis are right there in our community. In partnership with the government, businesses, community leaders and individuals, north Minneapolis will thrive and be a community that more of us, like me, can be proud to call home.

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