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Tornado relief shifts to new gear

Article by: Jean Hopfensperger, Star Tribune Updated: June 6, 2011 - 8:31 PM



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Volunteers tried to lift a fence in order to get at some debris in the area near N. Penn Ave. and N 26th Ave., an area that was heavily damaged by the tornado.

Photo: Jim Gehrz, Star Tribune Buy Photos Star Tribune photo galleries view larger

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The biggest branches and trees have been hauled away from the tornado-ravaged yards in north Minneapolis. Power is restored. Neighbors have food and other essentials.

As north Minneapolis shifts into a new phase of tornado recovery, a group of 30 local nonprofits have announced they plan to stick with the cleanup and recovery as long as it takes.

"What the world sees when they see disaster relief is the [American] Red Cross or Salvation Army," said Louis King, CEO of Summit Academy OIC, a vocational training center and member of the new Northside Community Response Team.

"But we're blessed with many organizations in Minneapolis ... and we have been here from the beginning, and we'll be here until the last nail is driven into the last house," said King, a response team leader who spoke at a press conference Monday.

After the May 22 tornado ripped through the neighborhood, Summit

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Academy and others sent volunteers door-knocking to check on residents in each home. Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church became a major distribution center. Emerge Community Development ran a phone bank center. Urban Homeworks coordinated the volunteer blitz.

But it's time to start rebuilding the community, said King, adding, "There is no playbook for this."

A priority is housing development, he said. The goal is to work with members of the National Association of Minority Contractors, local businesses and other groups so that recovery funds can create jobs and stimulate the local economy.

Meeting basic human needs remains critical, said King. "It's easy to get excited about the rebuild, and not capture the fact that people still need support. Some didn't have that much to begin with."

The Minneapolis Foundation and the Greater Twin Cities United Way are still coordinating donations. Although the tornado is no longer hot news, needs have not disappeared. "We thank everyone for their help," he said. "But we need them for the long haul."

Jean Hopfensperger • 612-673-4511

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