



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 6, 2012

Heroism, Charity Evident After Last Week's Devastating Twisters

More than 150 tornadoes ravaged the Midwest and South from February 28 to March 3, mostly in Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, and Alabama. The twisters — estimated to cost as much as \$2 billion in insurance claims — caused 39 confirmed deaths and destroyed countless homes and buildings. But while the tornadoes left overwhelming loss in their wake, they also provided an opportunity for heroism and charity among the citizens.



In Chelsea, Indiana, school bus driver Terry Kleopfer and two of her co-workers were carrying 60 children on their three buses when they spotted the storm approaching and sprang into action. Taking shelter behind a giant cooler in a convenience store, they managed to save all the children and themselves from the tornado, which claimed the lives of four other people, and destroyed Kleopfer's home.

Stephanie Decker, of West Liberty, Kentucky, [proved](#) the depths of a mother's love when she heroically shielded her two children as their home was ripped apart and collapsed on them. As a result, her legs were crushed, and she sustained seven broken ribs and a punctured lung as well. She is now in critical but stable condition at University Hospital in Louisville, having had both legs amputated.

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When Stephanie's husband Joe visited her at the hospital, he comforted her with these words: "You're alive and you get to see your kids grow up. If you look in the basement, there's no way anybody should have lived, let alone two kids who don't have a scratch on them."

Stephanie recalled the horrific events: "I remember the whole thing. I stayed conscious the whole time. I couldn't afford [to pass out]. They needed me. They had to have me, so I had to figure out what to do. I realized that if I didn't get help soon, I was going to bleed out. And my son is a hero. He went to get help."

As people began to return to their homes and businesses to assess the damage, and cope with the loss of their loved ones, a multitude of people from across the country offered to help.

For example, Tim Hetzner, president of Lutheran Church Charities, [traveled](#) to Harrisburg, Illinois, this week to see how his organization might help provide housing and comfort for displaced people there. He then journeyed to southern Indiana, where he will be sending his organization's comfort dogs to help victims cope with their loss.



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"When people pet a dog, they relax," he explained. "Their blood pressure goes down, we know that medically, and when that happens, they're more attuned to share what they've been through."

One [volunteer](#) from Elkhart County, Harland Moon, left for southern Indiana yesterday to help wherever he can. He spent Sunday collecting a number of donated items at the Jefferson Township Fire Station near Goshen and is driving to distribute them in Henryville. He also intends to use his construction background to assist in the rebuilding, remodeling, and cleanup efforts, spending at least three to four days there.

Volunteers from the First Baptist Church in Louisa have been helping the victims of Lawrence County, Kentucky. "We've seen some tragedies in our life, but wow, what we've seen the past few days is amazing," noted youth pastor Chuck Price. "No one had to ask. People just showed up with chainsaws, food, and they just want to do something. They love their neighbors, and that's what the Bible tells us to do."

Likewise, volunteers have been working diligently to [serve](#) other volunteers who have been toiling nonstop since the storms hit. Volunteers prepared food for utility workers and the National Guard at the Genoa Elementary school in Wayne County. "They work long hard hours in the cold," Fort Gay resident Janice Christian said. "Anything we can do for them, we'll do."

Latoria Potter of Chesapeake, Ohio, indicated she would open up her home to those who need shelter — as she did in 2010, when 10 people lost their home in a fire in Pedro, Ohio.

Volunteers [flocked](#) to Henryville, where the devastation is massive.

"I don't think there's barely over 2,500 people in this city and there's probably more than that just in volunteers coming to help," said Louisville resident Brian Smith.

Vehicles were filled to overflowing with supplies for those in need. One helper, Amanda Biesel, explained, "Volunteer just [like] to see the relief on people's faces like 'wow, I have a toothbrush, I can brush my teeth or I have water.'"

One of the walls of Henryville's high school gym was ripped off by a twister. On Sunday, members of the rival high school basketball team came to support the home team. "We got a little bit over \$400 to give to the church and then we collected a Uhaul trailer full, a half a trailer, and a 12-passenger van full of clothes, water, baby food, diapers just all kinds of stuff they'll need," said Ashley Elliot, one of the rival team members who used Facebook to collect money and clothes.

The victims of the tornadoes have [flocked](#) to their churches and other venues for faith-building and prayer. On Sunday evening, over 1,000 people of Harrisburg, Illinois, [gathered](#) at the Harrisburg High School for a special evening prayer service to mourn the deaths of six people and to pray for the hundreds who have been injured.

"I know that you join with me tonight to grieve for those who lost their lives and especially now for those families that are left behind, going through their grieving process," said Pastor Roger Lipe of McKinley Avenue Baptist Church.

"There were some of you who don't have anything, but you were there to give everything," noted Pastor Barry Steed of Little Chapel Church. "Those of you who have much were there to give everything. And we started seeing heroes in waiting starting to arise. So my report to you is that although on that morning we felt like we were alone, we aren't alone. Our God is good, he is alive, and that is the report."



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A number of generous donors, both individuals as well as organizations, have already come forward to offer financial help for the victims. JP Morgan Chase [announced](#) today that it will donate \$100,000 to the American Red Cross for tornado relief, and Sprint [pledged](#) \$50,000.

Additionally, two professional basketball teams —the Indiana Pacers and the Indiana Fever — have [made](#) a donation of \$100,000 to assist tornado relief efforts in Indiana. “The Indiana Pacers organization is proud to be a part of this effort. The need is great and we are happy to do whatever we can,” assured Pacers and Fever owner Herb Simon. “We join our fans and the citizens of Indiana in helping those in need.”

There are also a number of local fundraising efforts across the country to benefit the victims of the tornadoes.

Cathy Mangels of Charlestown, Indiana, was so moved by the heartbreaking stories coming out of the Midwest that she felt [compelled](#) to do something. Initially, she intended simply to donate clothes and items to the victims, but decided to take it a step further with a “roadblock,” collecting money in buckets from passing motorists. “It was kind of like an epiphany, you know,” she said. “I’ve done fundraising all my life with my father.

Americans have always proven themselves to be a charitable people in times of crisis. As Senator John Kerry observed, “The American spirit wears no political label. In service to others...there are no Republicans; there are no Democrats; there are only Americans.”



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