



On February 5th, 2008, parts of Macon County disappeared as homes were ripped from their foundations, trees uprooted from the ground, and 14 lives were literally blown away when winds in excess of 180 mph roared through our quiet community.

Unlike Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, one year after a deadly twister devastated Lafayette, many survivors are still not able to go home.

Although several have already rebuilt, others are still haggling with their insurers and dozens of FEMA trailers dot the countryside.

The splintered houses have been removed and the snapped utility poles have been replaced; and after a year of hard work and sacrifice, the people of Macon County are still trying to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives.

“It’s hard to believe,” said Police Chief Jerry Dallas, “that a year has come and gone since that deadly election night, back in early February of 2008.”

“When Officer Garrett Flatt’s chilling message came over the police radio, ‘It’s got me and I can’t get away from it’, I had no idea what to expect next.”

“The path of destruction was one mile wide and 20 miles long,” Chief Dallas continued, “and the twister knocked out 100 percent of electricity in the county.”

“After my initial survey of the hardest hit areas including Long Creek, Tuck, Akersville and Galen Roads, I realized a door-to-door search was crucial. Sitting up a command post at the police station as soon as possible, I took a county map and marked where the tornado entered and exited, and sent eight to ten crews out to every road, house, ditch, field, barn and shed that was in its path.”

With help from Steve Jones and 911, Randall Kirby and the Ambulance Service, Macon and Red Boiling Springs law enforcement departments, the Tennessee Highway Patrol, the National Guard, Lafayette Fire Chief Keith Scruggs and neighboring county police agencies, the search was broadened to areas harder to reach.

“When daylight came,” Chief Dallas explained, “we barricaded the hardest hit areas to search for the presumed dead and to protect people’s property.”

“In the days and weeks that followed, the people of Macon County came out to help their friends and neighbors, wherever they were needed, and they were the real heroes in the face of disaster.”

“In the wake of this terrible tragedy,” Chief Dallas said with a look of pride in his eyes, “I’ve never been prouder of the Lafayette Police Department.”

Macon County General Hospital Administrator Dennis Wolford, also has a lot to be proud of.

“By the time I reached the hospital on that infamous night in early February of last year,” recalls Wolford, “everything was already in place.”

“No one ever anticipates a disaster of this magnitude, but our Disaster Plan kicked in immediately and we were virtually unstoppable in Macon County’s time of need.”

“We had plenty of doctors, nurses, practitioners and volunteers, who helped us treat between 80 to 90 of the walking wounded that night. Our staff was very compassionate with each individual and worked extremely hard to comfort those in distress.”

“I’ve never seen a community come together so quickly,” Wolford continued, “especially in the wake of the worst natural disaster to ever befall this section of Middle Tennessee. I suppose that’s why my wife and I have come to love Macon County so much in the 25 years we’ve been

here.”

“I would also like to add that Macon County General was recognized by the State Commissioners of Health and the Tennessee Hospital Association, for administering the best care possible to so many people in such a short period of time.”

“It’s hard to believe it’s already been a year,” Wolford said, “and I’ve seen tremendous progress made in regard to rebuilding in the hardest hit areas.”

“The eyes of the world were on Macon County, seeing how our community responded in the aftermath of a powerful EF4 tornado. Again, I look back and realize how proud I am of Macon County and what has been accomplished.”

On one level, I suppose God seemed far away on that unusually warm winter night 12 months ago. But for those who survived, God’s presence remains.

One year later, February 5th, 2008, remains a vivid memory to the citizens of our peaceful community. Words had been written and stories have been told about the horrific loss in our lives and survivors remember all the little acts of kindness.

Many people say they couldn’t have gotten through this terrible ordeal without the help of family and friends, and no one takes anything for granted anymore.