

# Crossroads Chronicle

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"Serving Cashiers, Glenville, Tuckasee and Sapphire Valley, N.C."

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## Disaster team ready to help at any moment



Tim Fowler (left), Carlton Fowler, Cindy Fowler and Ron Fowler take a short break from cleaning up tornado-ravaged housing developments in Oklahoma.

Devastation stretches to the horizon as far as you can see in every direction.



A lone couch and one wall are all that's left standing of this house. An elderly couple clung to faith as the tornado demolished the rest of their house. Emergency Medical Service workers spray painted an angel above the couch as a reminder that angels were watching over the couple.

**By Silandara Skydancer**  
Staff writer

The winds were coming. They didn't have enough time to get to safety.

They sat together on the couch, 89 and 90 years old, holding each other and praying. Praying that it would soon pass, praying it would spare them.

The walls came down around them. The carpet was sucked out from underneath the couch they were sitting on. The home they knew was being torn apart and scattered across the land, tables and lamps whisked away, dishes they had eaten from that morning now in pieces miles away.

Dirt and debris swirled around. They were spattered with mud and dust. But they held onto each other and their faith — even when the winds sucked the shoes off her feet.

Neighbors found them after the tornado passed. All but one wall of their house was completely destroyed — the wall

against which the couch stood. They were muddy, but unhurt, not even scratched, said Carlton Fowler of the Cashiers Baptist Youth Disaster Team. Four people in that subdivision died.

The youth disaster team heard the call in May to help tornado-ravaged areas in Oklahoma. The Cashiers Baptist Young Adult group had wanted to put together a disaster relief team, and on the morning of Sunday, May 9, the time was right.

At Sunday school that morning they started making plans. By that night, the word had spread and they received an anonymous \$5,000 donation to buy a utility trailer to take with them.

"The next thing we knew, donations started coming in from all over," Fowler said. They have received about \$1,500 in additional donations.

They stocked the trailer with their own supplies and

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with supplies and donations from individuals, groups and churches in the community — water, tarps, hammers, saws, chainsaws and hand tools.

They left for Oklahoma on Wednesday, May 12, driving straight through the night to reach a state of destruction the next morning.

"It was pretty much total destruction wherever the path was," said Pat Stewart.

"Most of the places we worked in, there were no structures left standing. Everything was leveled for about as far as you could see in every direction. That was one of things that was so hard to be-

lieve — that much destruction in every direction," said Fowler.

Once in Oklahoma, the group learned that at its widest part, the tornado's path was a mile wide. It was almost 100 miles long. The highest wind speed ever recorded for a tornado was 315 mph. This one was recorded at 317 mph.

On average, said Fowler, a tornado stays on the ground from three to five minutes. This one was on the ground for eight-and-a-half hours.

It even pulled the grass right out of the ground.

About 44 people died and over 1200 were injured in the

tornado.

The disaster relief team stayed in Oklahoma for three days, pulling cars off houses, sorting through the rubble for valuables, clearing trees and sorting food and clothing to distribute to people in need.

The group is affiliated with Hearts with Hands, a disaster and humanitarian relief group in Asheville. Hearts with Hands made arrangements for the group to go and provided financial support. The Cashiers Baptist Youth Disaster Team will continue to work with them, ready to go at a moment's notice.

None of it, however, would

be possible without the support of the community, said Fowler.

"It was just unbelievable how the community came together in just two or three days time to make it possible for us to leave, and provided everything that we needed and we never even had to ask," he said. "For something like this people just gave without thinking."

Perhaps they followed the example already set. The Cashiers Baptist Church Young Adults seem to give without a second thought themselves.

On Saturday, July 24, at their third annual benefit auction they raised more than

\$10,000, despite pouring rain and thunderstorms earlier in the afternoon.

The first auction brought in \$6,000 and last year's made \$8,000, said Fowler.

Proceeds are used to give Christmas gifts to underprivileged children and help needy families and individuals in the community. Since 1997 they have given away almost \$20,000 — paying medical and electrical bills, buying clothing and food and reaching out a helping hand right where help is needed.