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One week later: Victims begin long process of restoring their lives

July 20, 2004

Lancaster, PA – In a few short minutes, a tornado destroyed homes in the development of Country Squire Estates, but the restoration of their property and life as they knew it may take months.

Tornado victims of South Londonderry Township in Lebanon County are receiving professional help from disaster restoration companies, but even the professionals are astonished by the devastation in Campbelltown.

According to John Kray, Production Manager for Compleat Restorations, one of the largest restoration companies in Pennsylvania and one of a dozen restoration companies helping tornado victims, "We've been in business over twenty five years and we have never seen a disaster of this scale and so many families needing our help at once. We had an emergency plan in place to respond to catastrophic events just like this, that's professionally-speaking. But personally-speaking, it's stunning to see the losses so many families suffered."

Restoration companies start by securing a damaged property for safety and from weather, helping victims find a place to stay, sending crews of restoration technicians to help dazed families sort through debris to find and inventory salvageable items, and working with the family and insurance adjusters to determine the scope of damage. They will then professionally clean the salvageable contents of the home, restore damaged items, and store

the belongings in company vaults. Meanwhile, they schedule and supervise any property demolition, dumpster hauling, tree services, carpenters, roofers, painters, as well as many other stages of repair and construction work.

Some houses that appeared intact were lifted off their foundation during the tornado and have been declared structurally unsound so will be demolished.

Compleat Restorations had been preparing for a large-scale disaster for months. Emergency bags for victims were prepared in advance and stored. Each contained soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, shaving cream, razors, deodorant, shampoo, combs, tablet, pen and flashlight.

Compleat Restorations also purchased a mobile command unit to use as on-site headquarters in cases of catastrophic losses. This is the first time the unit has been deployed. It is stationed at the end of English Drive in Country Squire Estates development. Equipped with computer, phones, printer, fax machine, emergency bags, water and food, the mobile command unit improves administration of services during large disasters. Damages can be quickly assessed, emergency services dispatched, and schedules coordinated. The location allows managers, employees, homeowners, suppliers, and insurance professionals a convenient place to report and gather information.

Bob Blackwell, Project Manager for Compleat Restorations is working closely with tornado victims and is very satisfied with the investment, "Having that mobile command unit here has been invaluable. Our communication process benefited so we've been able to give faster service, victims have come here to get a free emergency bag, we supplied our employees who have been working double shifts with nutritional breaks, and it's even served as a respite where our homeowners have come in for a cup of coffee and escape the harsh reality for a few minutes."

When the first stages of damage assessment and emergency work begin in a situation of large losses, homeowners may still be in shock and will experience an array of emotions before the process is completed.

Lucy Ellis, Human Resources Manager at Compleat Restorations, explains, “We try to see that our employees are not only professional but also compassionate. When we are called out to a job, the homeowner has suffered already. We ask that employees listen to the homeowner’s needs and treat the customer’s property as if it were their own.”

Later, owners who are displaced due to disaster such as fire or tornado sometimes want to visit their belongings in the restoration company’s vaults while their property is being stored. Sometimes it’s to see how well Grandma’s rocking chair cleaned up or get holiday decorations, or just to retrieve familiar items that will make their temporary residence more comfortable. Throughout the restoration process, respectful and frequent communications between the company and property owner is essential for successful personal recovery, as well as restoration of property.

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