

TBM serves school, clears fallen trees after tornadoes

April 23, 2019

Texas Baptist Men disaster relief volunteers enabled a small school district to provide meals for students, removed fallen trees from homes, provided clean water and shared the love of Christ in communities hit by mid-April tornadoes.



A TBM chainsaw crew from Orange works on a storm-damaged tree at a home in Alto. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Within one week after a series of tornadoes devastated Alto and Franklin, TBM workers contributed 6,950 volunteer hours. They cooked more than 2,100 meals, purified more than 1,000 gallons of water and distributed nearly 900 boxes to enable storm survivors to gather and store scattered belongings.

In the process, the volunteers made more than 700 personal contacts in the two communities, distributed 67 Bibles and recorded nine professions of faith in Christ.

Meals for school children

One of the two tornadoes that hit Alto severely damaged Alto High School. Since it compromised the building's structural integrity, students had to meet in repurposed space in the adjoining elementary and middle schools when classes resumed April 22. The high school cafeteria—which serves all the Alto schools—particularly was hard-hit.

On their first day back to school, students received muffins for breakfast and sandwiches for lunch.



TBM disaster relief volunteers set up a field kitchen where cafeteria workers will prepare meals for Alto schoolchildren for the remainder of the school year. (Photo / Rand Jenkins / TBM)

Initial discussions with school officials centered on the possibility of TBM volunteers cooking meals for students during the five remaining weeks before summer vacation. After additional conversations, a better idea emerged.

TBM volunteers set up a fully equipped field kitchen April 23 outside Alto Elementary School. Then they trained the school district's food service staff

how to use the equipment and agreed to leave it with them for the remainder of the school year.

“We might have been serving sandwiches for five weeks if not for the field kitchen,” said Courtney Stephenson, food service director for the Alto Independent School District. “Now students will be getting the good warm meals at school they’re probably not getting at home. It’s a blessing.”

Significantly, the agreed-upon solution enabled TBM to avoid committing a large number of volunteers for an extended time, and it allowed the district’s food service staff to continue to serve students—and still have a paying job.



Jimmy Allen (left), mayor of Alto, visits with Russell Schieck, on-site coordinator for TBM disaster relief in Alto. (Photo / Ken Camp)

“I see God’s fingerprints all over this,” said Russell Schieck, on-site director for the TBM disaster relief operation in Alto. “It’s good for us, and it’s good for the community, since it keeps everybody doing what they normally would be doing.”

Working together

While a chainsaw crew from Orange removed wind-damaged limbs from his property, Alto Mayor Jimmy Allen expressed appreciation for all the work TBM has done in his community.

Other TBM chainsaw crews and heavy equipment operators from Collin Baptist Association, Kingsland Baptist Church in Katy and Paramount Baptist Church in Amarillo worked throughout the area. In addition to completing 28 chainsaw jobs in one week, one crew also installed a temporary roof on a house when a storm threatened.



A chainsaw team from Collin Baptist Association works together to remove wind-splintered limbs from a tree before they can do further damage to a homeowner's roof. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Allen reported 40 homes destroyed and another 75 damaged in his town of

1,000 residents. He noted TBM workers continued to provide purified drinking water while Alto remained under a boil water notice.

He praised the spirit of cooperation and rapid response of volunteers—not only TBM workers who arrived less than 24 hours after tornadoes swept through Alto and the surrounding area, but also local residents who immediately helped their neighbors.

“Tractors started rolling in to clear the roads to help first responders get in,” Allen said.

Spirit of cooperation

Schieck also noted the spirit of cooperation evident throughout the community, particularly among its churches. Congregations of various denominations worked with a variety of out-of-town and sometimes out-of-state ministries, and they readily shared information and supplies with each other.

Hilltop Baptist Church housed TBM volunteers and allowed them to fill the church’s parking lot with disaster relief equipment.

On Easter, Christians from most of the churches in town—and volunteers who had traveled to Alto to serve—gathered downtown to worship at an outdoor sunrise service.



A TBM chainsaw volunteer works in Alto. (Photo / Ken Camp)

About 100 miles to the southwest, TBM volunteers worked in Franklin, where an EF-3 tornado destroyed 55 homes.

In one week, TBM workers in Franklin donated more than 3,100 volunteer hours, preparing about 1,000 meals, logging 112 hours on heavy equipment and completing 27 chainsaw jobs.

First Baptist Church in Franklin housed the TBM volunteers. Ted Elmore, interim pastor at the church [tweeted](#): “It has been a busy week, and I have watched people come together in love and harmony in Jesus’ name to help. ...” \

To contribute financially to TBM disaster relief, send a check designated “disaster relief” to Texas Baptist Men, 5351 Catron, Dallas, TX 75227, call (214) 275-1116 or click [here](#).