

Pillsbury United Communities rallies after devastating tornado rips through North Minneapolis

Written by Chanda Smith Baker, President/CEO Pillsbury United Communities
Tuesday, 24 May 2011 17:42

On Sunday, May 22, 2011, an EF1 tornado (winds up to 125 mph) ripped through the streets of north Minneapolis, damaging homes and businesses. Many of our neighbors were directly impacted by the storm, as was Pillsbury United Communities (PUC). I am writing to you with an update on the impact of the storm and a request for support.

First and foremost, the families in north Minneapolis have been devastated. Throughout Monday, our Oak Park Neighborhood Center--located at 1701 Oak Park Ave N on the North Side--had a steady stream of people coming in to use electricity to plug in cell phones, laptops, and other electronics. Furthermore, we have been inundated with phone calls from individuals and businesses looking for resources and referrals. We have responded to this crisis as we always have with time, energy, resources, ingenuity, and community support.

PUC has extended its hours at the Oak Park Neighborhood Center from 8am to 9pm until further notice. Oak Park has opened its doors and meeting rooms for people to meet with insurance adjusters and other contractors, and phones, fax, computers, and a copier have been made available to the public. We have also provided coolers and ice, and have made transportation available. Moreover, we have relied on our broad network of partnerships to refer community members to the resources they will need to recover from this terrible tragedy.

Secondly, one PUC facility located at 1200 37th Ave N was hit by the tornado. Damage at the Camden facility ranges from broken windows to roof, water, and additional damages, causing PUC to cancel programs, and relocate our programmatic and executive staff to our Oak Park Neighborhood Center location.

Lastly, PUC staff often live in the neighborhoods they serve. About 20-30 staff that live in north Minneapolis have been impacted by the tornado. Our human resources staff is working with each staff person to determine how we might best support them through this disaster. My home was hit and we had significant damage to our roof, doors, windows, and yard. Our family is packing up and will be in an extended stay hotel. This is the reality facing our community. I should mention that all staff and residents impacted by the storm are safe, and many are volunteering their time to help cleanup from the aftermath.

We have received an outpouring of support and concern across all sectors and neighborhoods, and for that we will be eternally grateful. Thank you for keeping us in your thoughts, and I will make sure to keep you updated on our work in the days, weeks, and months to follow.

Recovering from this tragedy will take both time and resources. Current needs include: flashlights, clothes, water, batteries, ice, coolers, blankets, and of course, emergency financial assistance. For more information or to make a tax-deductible donation to assist in the recovery efforts, please call 612-377-7000 or visit www.puc-mn.org .