

FACES OF THE FLOOD



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Catherine Mayhew, executive director of the Community Resource Center, works in a temporary warehouse space at A+ Storage, which was offered rent free to the nonprofit after last month's flood.

Flooded with 'miracles'

Nonprofit finds abundance of helping hands after storm

BY ERIC SNYDER

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When the facts on the ground change, a commander must change tactics.

Catherine Mayhew, executive director of the Community Resource Center, knows this lesson well. The resource center — a Nashville nonprofit that solicits, purchases and distributes new household merchandise to other area nonprofits — is expanding its focus in response to May's flood. In addition to working with its nonprofit partners, the resource center is preparing to become a "tool shed" of building supplies, materials and furniture to help rebuild homes.

"We're trying to respond to what people really need, when they need it," Mayhew said.

The resource center is doing all this from a temporary warehouse, after its storage building on Omohundro Place — a stone's throw from the Cumberland River — was filled with 10 feet of floodwaters. The building now sits gutted, awaiting repairs.

Before the flood, Community Resource Center was two employees: Mayhew and partnership coordinator Betsy Everett. With their space flooded, Everett spent the Monday after the flood volunteering with Hands On Nashville, while Mayhew started with the little things: stopping the mail and changing the group's phone numbers to lines that would work.

Wednesday morning, Mayhew met with the center's board president, John Scannapieco, of

Bradley Arant Boult Cummings. This, he said, should be the nonprofit's shining moment.

Their next step was clear: Find temporary space. "All kinds of miracles happened from then on," Mayhew said.

Everett cited the importance of social networks like Twitter and Facebook in finding help after the flood. It was the group's blog — Two Chicks in a Warehouse — that brought its first break. (Post-flood, there are now three chicks in the warehouse.)

Two minutes after posting that the center was looking for temporary space, Mayhew got a call — from a stranger — about possible warehouse space. By Thursday, thanks to owner Robert Craig, Mayhew and Everett had set up shop in A+ Storage in the Gulch, rent-free.

Home goods poured in from Second Harvest and Dollar General, but donations also came from unusual suspects — four T-shirts from Peter Frampton (which had survived flooding in Frampton's storage space) and cleat-less practice shoes donated from the Tennessee Titans.

Thanks partly to monitoring requests on social networks — like the Cheatham County Chamber of Commerce's request for paper towels, gloves and fans on Twitter — the resource center has emptied and restocked its temporary warehouse four times, distributing more than \$3 million worth of goods.

"You wouldn't believe the relationships I have rekindled because of this," Mayhew said.

Mayhew reached out to Sybil

Lessons Learned

- **Have a disaster plan that covers everything from personnel to technology.** Include alternate sites where you can do business.
- **Have multiple back-ups for your computer data,** including an Internet-based back-up.
- **Have a plan to communicate with customers and clients during and after the emergency.** Community Resource Center did this using a Web-based e-mail system.
- **Make arrangements to "borrow" staff** in an emergency from similar nonprofits or businesses.

— Catherine Mayhew

McLain, the marketing director at **Street Dixon Rick Architecture**. The response came back in all caps: "WE WANT TO HELP."

"They're one of those nonprofits that just pours every ounce of what they get into good use," said Baird Dixon, a principal in **Street Dixon Rick**, which is designing the resource center's warehouse as it rebuilds.

Mayhew estimates the cost of repairing the warehouse at more than \$300,000. A \$140,000 Small Business Administration loan is all but finalized, and Mayhew is working with a handful of foundations on what she described as a six-figure donation. A fundraiser set for July 13 is hoped to make up the remainder. Even while rounding up the funds, the center is developing programs that will utilize the new space.

Said Mayhew, "People think this is all over with, and it's not."