

DISASTERS HIT

COLONELS RESPOND



The Honorable Order of
**Kentucky
Colonels®**

2021-2024 TORNADO & FLOOD RELIEF REPORT

Western Kentucky

TORNADOS

On December 10, 2021, western Kentucky was struck by one of the most violent tornados in recent history. Colonel Kevin Harned, Chief Meteorologist at WAVE3 News out of Louisville, was on the ground in Mayfield just two days later.

“Violent, long-track tornados are uncommon in this part of the country, and they are especially rare during the month of December. For 165.7 miles, this tornado destroyed the landscape and disrupted thousands of lives. The path was the ninth longest in recorded history. Rated an EF4 with wind speeds nearing 200 MPH, the storm killed 77 people. The statistics and meteorology are fascinating, but even more so was the immediate response and strong will of the people of western Kentucky.”

— Colonel Kevin Harned

Mayfield, one of the hardest-hit towns, suffered catastrophic damage to its historic downtown district; 3,778 homes, 183 commercial properties, and 103 other buildings were destroyed. Despite the overwhelming destruction, the spirit of resilience was evident. Colonel Harned recalled, “The resolve to rebuild was palpable in the hours after the storm. Crews were working around the clock to clear debris, hundreds of volunteer groups were helping the displaced, and residents were sharing stories of survival.”

The Kentucky Colonels worked quickly to establish new partnerships to assist in recovery. From the week after the tornados hit until December 2024, over \$4 million was granted to help affected communities. Though the tornado left behind immense destruction, the collective strength of the communities highlighted the unbreakable will to rebuild.

WESTERN KENTUCKY GRANTS BY NEEDS

RELIEF NEEDS	AMOUNT
Building Materials, Homes, and Storage	\$2,982,870.27
Miscellaneous	\$355,000.00
Restoration of Facilities/Buildings	\$253,505.00
Immediate Needs	\$245,000.00
Items for Residents	\$176,150.00
Total	\$4,012,525.27

COUNTIES RECEIVING AID

- Barren
- Caldwell
- Christian
- Fulton
- Graves
- Hart
- Hickman
- Hopkins
- Logan
- Lyon
- Marion
- Marshall
- McCracken
- Muhlenberg
- Ohio
- Taylor
- Warren



MAYFIELD GRAVES COUNTY LONG-TERM RECOVERY GROUP



The Mayfield Graves County Long-Term Recovery Group (MGC LTRG) was formed in response to the tornados and serves as the central source of recovery for individuals impacted. The first tornado relief grant received from the Colonels advanced their efforts by helping to purchase a warehouse to store the collection of critical building materials, furniture, appliances, and other essential household items donated. These resources have helped survivors achieve a holistic recovery.

Larry and Tina Potter faced the full force of the devastating tornado. For nearly two years, they made do in a cramped camper with their two young boys situated in their pastor's backyard. Tina said the hardest part was not having room for the kids to play. They found hope when Samaritan's Purse approved them for a new home in the New Hope Acres community. While waiting for their new home, they were assisted by a Disaster Case Manager named Heyde, who helped them replace essential items lost.

beginning arrived on December 15, 2023, marking over two years since the tornado. Tina continued, "Heyde even brought a 'Welcome' mat on the day we received our house, and she brought stuffed animals for the boys." Tina shared emotionally. "It's the little things that she and the LTRG did just to make us feel more comfortable."

In addition, the MGC LTRG received funding for their Home for the Holidays program, which later developed into the New Lease on Life nonprofit. This nonprofit received funding for a bunkhouse for volunteers and additional building materials to help continue the recovery three years later.

Tina noted, "Through the LTRG, Heyde helped us get sheets, blankets, towels, kitchen appliances, and other stuff because I didn't have any of that. I only had one frying pan and one saucepan." Their new



"While giving at the start of recovery efforts, when emotions run high, is commendable, what truly sets Kentucky Colonels apart is their unwavering support even three years later, when resources are scarce and survivors are still in need. Their dedication to the long-term recovery of Graves County survivors has left a profound impact on our community. Kentucky Colonels have helped change the trajectory of countless lives, creating a ripple effect that will benefit generations to come."

— Amy Chicoine, MGC LTRG Executive Director



This newly created nonprofit used grant monies to purchase and rehabilitate multiple vacant and abandoned properties by landlords who did not choose to fix their investments in the Mayfield-Graves County area—these are affordable housing options for tornado survivors to rent.

To date, 23 properties have been purchased, and 18 new construction homes have been completed. Additional awarded funds have been used to purchase the construction materials and for contractors to complete these homes' plumbing, electrical, and HVAC work.



CAMP GRAVES OF WATER VALLEY



The primary focus for tornado recovery for Camp Graves of Water Valley was to offer temporary shelter through tiny homes while connecting low-income residents with essential resources that aid in their recovery and eventual transition to permanent housing. With funding from the Colonels, Camp Graves has been able to construct these homes, allowing families to stay rent-free for up to 18 months. A total of 69 households have been assisted to date.

In addition to shelter, Camp Graves offers a variety of supportive services, including a food pantry, clothing assistance, and utility support. The growing “Resource Bank” helps staff connect residents with important referrals, ensuring those in need receive the help they deserve.

Camp Graves was able to expand its temporary housing options with six Shipping Container Homes. When these units are no longer needed to support those impacted by the tornadoes, the units will support their “Fostering Potential” program and will serve as safe spaces for young adults aging out of foster care, giving them the resources, guidance, and stability needed to thrive independently. Additional funds received were also used to help furnish appliances in apartments to assist renters with temporary housing, and funds were used to help complete Camp Rendezvous, which will be a veteran housing and work center.



The Hope Initiative, based in Mayfield, received tornado relief funds that enabled the organization to provide new, safe homes for 54 families. The funds granted by the Kentucky Colonels were used to purchase essential building materials such as framing lumber, roofing materials, windows, doors, insulation, flooring, cabinetry, and appliances. They facilitated the construction of garages to provide families with safe space for their vehicles and belongings.

The Hope Initiative partnered with Mennonite Disaster Services (MDS), a renowned disaster relief organization. MDS supplied skilled volunteer labor, assisting in the construction of homes at no cost to the families. These

volunteer efforts built homes quickly and efficiently.

One family deeply impacted by the tornado was the Haungs. Yan Haung, her husband, Hui Lin, and their two children had endured the destruction of their apartment, followed by the dangers of

black mold, which caused their young son, Allen, to develop asthma. For months, they lived in unsafe conditions due to a housing shortage. Thanks to the Hope Initiative, the Haungs were given the keys to their new home on the third anniversary of the tornado—a moment of joy and renewed hope for their future.

“Among the many lessons we have learned, few stand out greater than the need for steadfast leadership following a disaster. The necessity of servant leaders who inspire hope, demonstrate compassion and keep their promises despite obstacles that arise. These are the qualities of a Kentucky Colonel, and because of those kind souls from around the Commonwealth of Kentucky and beyond that have given, served, and led, we have been able to help more families than we ever thought possible.”

— Colonel Stephen Boyken, Lead Pastor, His House Ministries, President & CEO, The Hope Initiative





DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS CHAPTER 118 BENTON



Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Chapter 118 in Benton provides assistance to local veterans and their families in Marshall and Calloway counties. The DAV Chapter helps local veterans file service-connected claims and receive benefits and resources such as medical transportation, family assistance with health and burial benefits, homeless and displaced veterans, and veteran compensations.

In this time of crisis, many veterans found themselves not only dealing with property damage but also the loss of critical military documents. These documents are essential for veterans to access assistance, particularly from FEMA. The chapter's computer systems, printers, and fax machines were insufficient to meet the high demand for record retrieval. The chapter's two officers were using their personal computers to provide services. The grant provided by Colonels allowed the purchase of computer equipment to assist the 97 local veterans.



MARCELLA'S KITCHEN

Marcella's Kitchen in Marshall County, already a local staple, began providing meals for those in need, offering three meals a day to volunteers and those affected. In addition to this vital service, they continued serving their regular meals to the community. The first night after the tornado, the Kitchen opened as an emergency shelter for anyone needing a place to stay, mainly serving first responders who were from out of town. Funding from the Kentucky Colonels allowed their doors to stay open for longer hours, averaging an additional 100 meals a day for over 5,000 meals a month.





LOTUS

Located in Paducah, Lotus is Kentucky's children's advocacy and sexual violence resource center for all eight counties of the Purchase Area Region. Funding from the Kentucky Colonels enabled Lotus to set up a satellite office in Mayfield. Natural disasters increase stressors on communities, leading to a rise in interpersonal violence, both in the short and long term. During the six month period following the December tornado, from January 1 through June 30, 2022, Lotus served 56% more Mayfield-Graves County children than they served during the same time period of 2021. This new Mayfield office focuses on child abuse victims, all-age survivors of sexual violence, and their families. From January 1 to December 31, 2024, Lotus provided a total of 5,516 specialized children's advocacy and sexual violence resource center services to 798 unique clients at its Mayfield location.



LONG-TERM RECOVERY GROUPS



A Long-Term Recovery Group (LTRG) is a collaborative body of volunteer representatives from faith-based, nonprofit, government, business, and other community organizations dedicated to helping individuals and families recover from disasters. While emergency response efforts focus on immediate needs, LTRG's focus is on the long-term process of restoring lives, homes, and communities. In addition to the Mayfield Graves LTRG, the Kentucky Colonels tornado relief funds also supported the Caldwell, Hopkins, and Muhlenberg County LTRGs.

Caldwell County LTRG identified households that were unable to restore their homes to safe conditions. The Colonels stepped in to assist with the essential repairs. The LTRG also received tornado relief funds to create a support group for those impacted.

The Hopkins County LTRG used tornado relief funds to finish out the inside of their warehouse to efficiently store and distribute materials and supplies needed for the construction of new homes. Additionally, funds were used toward work that required professional contractors such as plumbing, electrical, and HVAC in 17 homes.

The grants provided by HOKC assisted the Muhlenberg County LTRG during the initial stages of recovery, helping around 100 families cope with losses. The funds further supported the establishment of a disaster recovery facility, which is part of a broader plan to establish regional centers across the state to address needs in the community affected by disasters.

Eastern Kentucky

FLOODS

Over July 26-30, 2022, heavy rain triggered massive flash flooding in eastern Kentucky. The estimated 14-16 inches of rainfall received in such a short period of time is historically unheard of: there is less than a 1-in-1,000 chance for this much rainfall over five days in a given year. The rainfall totals observed were 600% over normal totals. Rainfall rates exceeding 4 inches per hour caused the North Fork Kentucky River at Whitesburg to rise about 18 feet in 10 hours, topping its record from January 1957. Normally, the river is only 1 to 2 feet deep.

The flash flooding resulted in widespread damage, displacing thousands of people, causing power outages for thousands, washed out roads, destroyed homes, and flooded schools. Forty-five lives were lost across six counties. Colonel Harned visited several of the hardest-hit counties. "The stories were hard to comprehend," Colonel Harned recalls. "Imagine being unexpectedly washed from your home in the middle of the night, grabbing for tree branches, hoping to survive as homes and other objects swiftly move past."

According to the Governor's office, more than 1,300 people were rescued, including about 600 by air. Following the flooding, having established partnerships through the Good Works Program with home-building organizations such as the Housing Development Alliance of Hazard and Housing Oriented Ministries Established for Service (HOMES) of Whitesburg helped streamline the funding and rebuilding efforts.

Despite the devastating tornados just eight months prior, Kentucky Colonels donated \$1.6 million that was distributed to nonprofits across eastern Kentucky.

EASTERN KENTUCKY GRANTS BY NEEDS

RELIEF NEEDS	AMOUNT
Building Materials, Homes, and Storage	\$1,218,388.58
Immediate Needs	\$255,000.00
Items for Residents	\$20,000.00
Restoration of Facilities/Buildings	\$68,650.03
Miscellaneous	\$64,500.00
Total	\$1,626,538.61

COUNTIES RECEIVING AID

- Breathitt
- Clay
- Floyd
- Harlan
- Knott
- Leslie
- Letcher
- Magoffin
- Martin
- Owsley
- Perry
- Pike
- Whitley



HOMES

HOMES, based in Whitesburg, has been operating since 1984 and has a well-established presence in the eastern Kentucky area. HOMES's mission is to provide affordable housing as a strategy for community revitalization, creating healthy community solutions in a region struggling with the effects of generational poverty. Over the three decades since HOMES was founded, they have established a long history with the Kentucky Colonels. Flood relief funds from the Colonels supported a variety of projects, from helping with mold remediation by providing fans and dehumidifiers to dry out flooded homes to providing needed equipment like work vans, trucks, a seamless metal roofing rig, a mini excavator, dump

trailer, equipment trailers, and concrete forms. Since the flood, HOMES has had 31 homes built or under construction.

To mitigate future flooding events, they have elevated homes out of flood zones and built new ones, including in Thompson Branch Community, which is a part of the state's Higher Ground Initiative that includes seven developments across

multiple counties. One of the individuals they have supported is Elizabeth Shehee, who is elderly and disabled. HOMES temporarily moved her into one of their rental homes while they raised her home above the floodplain. Not only did they raise the home, but they were also able to make it more accessible.

"Thanks to the Kentucky Colonels, HOMES has been able to grow its workforce and add to its vehicle fleet, which has allowed us to complete more jobs for homeowners needing repairs of their flooded home and get to new construction job sites efficiently."

— Chris Combs, HOMES Program Manager

APPALACHIAN CITIZENS' LAW CENTER

The Appalachian Citizens' Law Center (ACLC) of Whitesburg represents coal miners and their families on issues of black lung and mine safety and fighting for policy that supports a more equitable future in the region. They are the only law center in the country working on this combination of issues. Flooding caused ACLC to close its office and their temporary offices were less accessible for disabled individuals. They received funding from Kentucky Colonels to begin repairs and construction at their Main Street location. Upon reopening the Main Street location, ACLC provided legal support to those impacted, including help with FEMA claims, wills, and insurance issues for flood victims.

The funding corrected issues in their aging building, including replacing outdated electrical work and renovating the first floor to include an ADA-compliant bathroom.



HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

The mission of Housing Development Alliance, Inc. (HDA) of Hazard is to use the power of housing to transform lives and build a brighter future for the community. As an affordable housing developer working across Breathitt, Knott, Leslie, and Perry counties, their purpose is to ensure that



every low-income family in their service area has an affordable home. HDA was already overwhelmed by the housing needs of the affected community; prior to the flooding, 28,000 out of 66,000 people lived in homes deemed inhabitable. After the flooding, an additional 11,500 people were impacted, including 3,000 homes damaged and over 500 destroyed.

Thanks to Kentucky Colonel funding, HDA was able to purchase two trucks—one for the new home framing crew and the other for home rehab carpenters. These trucks greatly expanded the capacity, allowing them to double their construction crews from five to 10, directly contributing to a doubling of their yearly production. To date, 134 individuals have been assisted.

When catastrophic flooding struck Lower River Caney, Farmer Baker lost everything—his home, his belongings, and, most heartbreakingly, his wife, Vanessa. The floodwaters came from broken silt pond dams high above their home and came so fast that escape was nearly impossible. Vanessa was tragically

swept away and remains the only one of 45 flood victims who has not been found. Now, more than two years later, with help from HDA and the Kentucky Colonels, Baker lives in a new home on higher ground, still holding on to the memory of his beloved wife. “I never thought I’d have a home like this again,” he said. “I love HDA for building me a new home and the Kentucky Colonels for buying me these new appliances.” Though he still grieves, he shared, “Vanessa’s still with me, though, and we’re going to make this place beautiful.”

As of 2024, the funds have been used to provide energy-efficient appliances for eight impacted families, with plans to support 20 by the end of 2025. Additionally, 12 survivors who earn \$25,000 or less will receive new HVAC units. HDA has completed 32 homes for flood survivors and 102 home rehabs. They currently have six new homes and four rehabs under construction, with 17 new homes and 55 rehabs pending. In total, HDA is assisting 210 survivors.

FLOYD COUNTY DISASTER RECOVERY COALITION



The Floyd County Disaster Recovery Coalition, formerly the LTRG, was initially reliant on the generosity of St. Vincent Mission for truck use before receiving a vital grant. With the grant, the Coalition was able to purchase a used, four-wheel-drive F-150 pickup truck, significantly improving its capacity.

The truck allows them to haul equipment and lumber directly to job sites, reducing trips back and forth. Moreover, the truck has been instrumental in helping case managers visit clients, particularly in difficult-to-reach areas. Delivery of furniture and household items has become easier. “The truck has relieved clients of the stress of transporting essential items,” noted Kalen Ousley, Co-Chair, Floyd County Disaster Coalition.



One of the many families helped by the Coalition was the Millard family, a father of two whose home was destroyed. The Coalition helped repair the hazardous deck and stairs of a new property and provided them with new mattresses and clothing. Millard, who was paralyzed and suffers from cognitive impairments after a car accident, continues to recover with support from the Coalition, including a ramp built by Hand in Hand Ministries. Thanks to the truck and grant, the Floyd County Disaster Recovery Coalition has enhanced its disaster response efforts, improving speed, effectiveness, and ongoing support for families like Millard’s. Funds were also used to purchase construction materials, appliances, tools, and food.



AUDIT OF DISASTER RELIEF GRANTS

Since December 2021, the Honorable Order has received contributions designated towards three Kentucky Disaster Relief programs – Western Kentucky Tornado Relief, Eastern Kentucky Flood Relief, and Rebuild Kentucky. In turn, we have granted these funds directly to nonprofit organizations that provided relief to Kentuckians affected by these disasters. All funds received and dispersed were subject to the audit procedures of our auditor, Forvis Mazars.

"We have provided audit and tax services for HOKC since 2021, and management diligently works to reconcile grant funding and provide grants to those organizations in need in Kentucky."

— Jennifer Williams, CPA,
Audit Partner at Forvis Mazars.

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mazars**

SUPPORTING BOTH DISASTERS



THE GENEROSITY OF THE RALSTON FAMILY AND THE ANGEL FOUNDATION

In the immediate days following the tornados in western Kentucky, Colonel Shannon Ralston contributed an unprecedented \$2 million to establish a challenge grant to all Colonels. The HOKC Board of Trustees committed \$1 million and put a request to Colonels across the world to match the remaining amount. Within several weeks, nearly half a million dollars were received from over 1,500 Colonels.

In November 2022, Colonel Ralston and The Angel Foundation issued the Rebuild Kentucky Challenge and pledged to match every gift made to rebuilding efforts in eastern and western Kentucky, dollar-for-dollar, up to \$1 million. An additional \$300,000 was contributed and, after being matched, provided an additional \$600,000 to disaster relief efforts in both areas of the state.

TRINITY METALS AND HOTEL TANGO BOURBON PARTNERSHIP

Trinity Metals, founded by General Wade Conner, and Hotel Tango Bourbon, founded by Colonel Travis Barnes, a combat-disabled Veteran, both based in Indianapolis, Indiana, teamed up to donate three barrels of bourbon with all proceeds assisting those impacted by the tornados. This partnership generated over \$42,000. Following the floods in eastern Kentucky, we were amazed again as the two groups partnered to provide another barrel of bourbon that raised over \$11,000 for those impacted in eastern Kentucky.

ADAPTING TO PROVIDE IMMEDIATE RELIEF AND SUPPORT

To provide more immediate relief, the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels Board of Trustees expedited our typical multi-step grant process recognizing the need to support organizations on the ground in the impacted areas. Working with existing partners, we followed best practices outlined in the Center for Disaster Philanthropy's Playbook.

In the week following the tornados, 23 grants totaling \$245,000 were distributed to trusted and vetted organizations that were providing immediate care. Similarly, \$255,000 was distributed to 16 organizations in eastern Kentucky for cleanup, repairs, cleaning supplies, and other essential needs following the flooding.

"...the success of the recovery of Mayfield, Kentucky is because of organizations like yours; this donation will work toward achieving the mission of rebuilding lives."

— Sally Michelson, Executive Director of Community Kitchen of Paducah

Following these immediate need grants, a streamlined process was quickly developed to allow organizations to apply for long-term recovery funds. While reviewed more quickly than our standard process, we remained committed to the Good Works Program's focus on funding tangible projects essential to rebuilding efforts. Our approach balanced urgency with sustainability, reinforcing the Playbook's emphasis on both immediate relief and long-term commitment.



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2021-2024 TORNADO & FLOOD RELIEF REPORT

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