

ANTHROPOLOGY AT ALABAMA

Newsletter of the University of Alabama Department of Anthropology
College of Arts and Sciences

TORNADO RECOVERY SPECIAL ISSUE, MAY 2011



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TORNADO RECOVERY SPECIAL ISSUE

Wednesday, April 27, 2011 witnessed an unprecedented outbreak of tornados in our state that claimed 255 lives. Late that afternoon, an extraordinarily violent tornado tore through the center of Tuscaloosa, destroying entire neighborhoods from one end of the city to the other. Although the cleanup has now begun, the scenes of destruction in the affected neighborhoods are still scarcely believable.

We are pleased to report that the Anthropology Department was fortunate. The tornado bypassed the UA campus to the south. Although some of our students lost their homes and property, none of the 41 dead nor the 6 still missing are Anthropology faculty, students or alumni.

In the immediate aftermath of this disaster, the Anthro faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students organized themselves into an ad hoc rescue team.

This special issue of the eNewsletter tells that story.

ANTHROPOLOGY ORGANIZES A RESCUE TEAM



The Anthro Crew heads out in caravan towards a work site.

In the evening of Wednesday, April 27, as the extent of the damage to Tuscaloosa first started to become clear, Anthropology faculty and students began systematically contacting members of our extended “family” to confirm their safety and assess their needs. In some cases, because of extensive damage to the communication infrastructure, we were able to establish contact only by entering affected areas by foot. Faced with growing reports that some of our students needed their belongings moved to places of safety, the Anthro faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students organized themselves into an ad hoc rescue team. Even while many of us were still without power, the team used College-provided portable iPads, email distribution lists, and Facebook postings to communicate.

Beginning on Friday, April 29, the team drove to their first rescue site with a caravan of pickup trucks and cars. Informally organized by Professor Kathy Oths and graduate students Erik Porth and Lauren Downs, they worked for about a week to help move out graduate students, alumni, and an undergraduate student before rains came, which could have done additional damage to tornado-damaged property.

By the middle of the week after the tornado struck, belongings of all Anthropology community members had been safeguarded to the maximum extent possible, and tarps had been laid on roofs to protect the still-standing homes. It was increasingly difficult to enter affected neighborhoods without proper identification. National Guard troops and Tuscaloosa police had become leery of looters and sightseers posing as volunteers. So the team shifted focus.

The City of Tuscaloosa provided a way to register a volunteer organization. Working once again under the leadership of Dr. Oths, Erik and Lauren, we formally organized as the UA Anthropology Crew. To date, roughly 30 have registered to continue volunteer work in the city. The crew’s efforts have included moving the entire contents of a local woman’s destroyed home, sorting donations at Temporary Emergency Services, and performing house-by-house damage assessments in two historic districts on behalf of the City (Glendale Gardens and The Downs). As part of this last project, the crew has assessed approximately 120 homes.

We recognize that the recovery will be a long-term process, and plan to continue assisting the community throughout the months to come in any way we can.

The following pages contain images of damage that the UA Anthropology Crew encountered, and document some of the work of the team.

Many friends outside of Tuscaloosa have contacted us asking how they can help. At the end of this issue, in place of our usual “opportunities for giving,” we have provided links to worthy organizations that are assisting those in need, including the American Red Cross and the University of Alabama Acts of Kindness Fund.

This community is resilient. Amidst grief at the magnitude of the losses, we have great faith that Tuscaloosa will recover and emerge stronger than ever. We thank all our friends for their support and for the kind wishes and concern that have poured into the Department from around the globe.

DAMAGE AND RESPONSE



The crew awaits a new assignment on a Saturday morning, 4-30-11.



Dr. Oths organizes the crew for a Saturday morning rescue of a grad student's belongings, 4-30-11.



The Anthro Crew arrives in a damaged area near McFarland Blvd, behind Big Lots, 4-30-11.



This was once the residence of Katy Groves, an Anthropology graduate student, 4-30-11.



Anthropologists organized themselves into an efficient salvage team, 4-30-11.



Katy's surviving belongings are packed into pickup trucks and cars, 4-30-11.

DAMAGE AND RESPONSE



Masks & gloves had to be worn to protect against fiberglass insulation. [Groves residence], 4-30-11.



Graduate students look for salvagable goods in a kitchen. [Groves residence], 4-30-11.



The view from what was once the back yard of a Katy's home. 4-30-11.



An American flag was found draped across a downed pine tree. [Groves residence], 4-30-11.



Scenes of violent destruction were everywhere along the routes to new jobs. 4-30-11.



Our Anthropology utility truck was the workhorse of the early post-tornado salvage operations.

DAMAGE AND RESPONSE



A hazardous job, salvaging a faculty member's belongings from Charleston Square Apts. 4-30-11.



Dr. Ian Brown and graduate students help a UA faculty member recover his belongings. 4-30-11.



Paul Eubanks's belongings moved to Blakely Brooks's & Shelly Hines-Brooks's carport. 5-2-11.



Graduate students take a short water break while Dr. Jim Knight moves boxes. 5-2-11.



Dr. Keith Jacobi helps organize Anthropology undergrad student Tom Potter's belongings. 5-2-11.



Erin Phillips, Sarah Szurek and Dr. Jacobi box Tom's belongings. 5-2-11.

DAMAGE AND RESPONSE



Exhausted grad students Blakely Brooks & Shelly Hines-Brooks take a much-needed break. 5-2-11.



The sounds of chain saws and the smells of cut wood and upturned earth filled the air. 5-2-11.



Lauren Downs and Erik Porth organize donated goods at Temporary Emergency Services. 5-9-11.



Drs. Galbraith and Oths organize donated shoes at Temporary Emergency Services. 5-9-11.



Denise Gonzalez and Becky Read conduct damage assessment in Glendale Gardens. 5-12-11.



Dr. Jacobi and grad students conduct Glendale Gardens damage & needs assessment. 5-12-11.

DAMAGE AND RESPONSE



This aerial view shows the track of the tornado and extent of the damage (the light brown damage track extends from the lower left to the upper right.) The UA campus, barely missed by the storm, is visible in the upper left quadrant. Red dots represent locations where the UA Anthropology Crew had undertaken home salvage operations as of Friday, May 13. The yellow rectangle shows the region of the two neighborhood damage and needs assessments.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS AND FUNDS ARE WORKING DILIGENTLY TO ASSIST TORNADO VICTIMS

AMERICAN RED CROSS, MID-ALABAMA REGION

[HTTP://ALREDCROSS.ORG](http://alredcross.org)

UNITED WAY OF WEST ALABAMA

[HTTP://WWW.UWWA.ORG/DONATENOW.HTML](http://www.uwwa.org/donatenow.html)

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA ACTS OF KINDNESS FUND

[HTTPS://WWW.UA.EDU/ADVANCEMENT/GIVING/DONATE/?DIVISION=2&ACCOUNT=349](https://www.ua.edu/advancement/giving/donate/?division=2&account=349)