

WORKPLACE

**Grassroots Advocacy:
AbilityOne Employees
Meet with Policymakers
in Washington, DC**

**New Brand Identity: Hello
'SourceAmerica,' Farewell
to 'NISH'**

**Sen. Harkin Receives
Javits Legislative Award**



Oklahoma

TORNADO

Brings Out The Best In AbilityOne Employees



By Gisele McAuliffe

The courage and job dedication of AbilityOne® Program employees emerged from the storm-ravaged region of an EF5 tornado that ripped through the suburbs of Oklahoma City on May 20. The staff and families of nonprofit agencies in the region were among the thousands who suffered near-death experiences and damage to their homes. Through it all they demonstrated an outstanding commitment to the Federal customer

by remaining on the job and reporting for work as usual in the days that followed.

Professional Contract Services Inc. (PCSI) provides vehicle operation and maintenance services to Tinker Air Force Base under an AbilityOne contract. Vicki Hoppes, contract manager for PCSI, reported the tornado barely missed the base. Employees took shelter on-site during the storm and

emerged afterwards to help with the cleanup.

The tornado wrecked the houses of three PCSI employees and another employee was displaced. Just hours after the tornado hit, all AbilityOne employees turned up to perform their work shifts—including the individuals who had lost their homes. “Our operations never stalled and we kept supporting Tinker Air Force Base,”

President Barack Obama tours tornado damage in Moore, Okla., May 26, 2013. Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin, FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate, and local officials accompany him. (Official White House Photo by Chuck Kennedy)

Hoppes said. “Base leadership quickly engaged and began assisting in the recovery effort,” Hoppes added. “Team Tinker called on PCSI to support with vehicles and drivers and I am very proud that all our employees showed up. That night, we provided tractor-trailers for the transportation of giant lighting systems for night rescue operations.” PCSI had all base vehicles ready to go, plus drivers and additional employees on standby. Other PCSI employees offered their expertise to help in any way they could. According to Hoppes, “Mike Kittel, who is the tire repairman for PCSI, came to me and said, ‘I know every tire on all of the first responders’ equipment. Let me know how I can be of service.’ We bused soldiers to and from the disaster area for several days.”

Despite the devastation caused by the storm, PCSI and its AbilityOne employees responded without hesitation to help provide transportation for a visit to the region by President Obama. The nonprofit agency provided nine vehicles and a taxi service for the Secret Service. It delivered a flatbed trailer near the landing spot of Air Force One for the staging of news media events. It supplied bus drivers to transport tornado victims to and from Tinker AFB for meetings with the President. It is worth noting that two of the individuals who met with the President were PCSI employee David Derrick and his wife Cindy. Their home was demolished by the tornado.

At **Dale Rogers Training Center** (DRTC) in Oklahoma City, the homes of six AbilityOne employees working on projects for the General Services Administration, Federal Aviation



DRTC Contract Manager David Ellis suffered damage to his house, and a family member had a close call.

Administration and Tinker Air Force Base were damaged or completely destroyed, and the child of one DRTC manager was injured. “Once teachers at Highland East Junior High School (in Moore, OK) realized the tornado was coming right at them, they pulled all the kids out of the halls and literally layered them on the floor in the restrooms,” reported Connie Thrash McGoodwin, executive director of DRTC. “Those on the bottom got a little bruised and scratched, but everyone made it.”

One dramatic story from the tornado involved DRTC contract manager, David Ellis, and his 13-year-old son, Dylan. The Ellis’s home was damaged by the storm. Elsewhere, Dylan emerged as a hero for saving the life of one of his school classmates at Highland East Junior High School. Dylan and his friend, Diane Lee, were among the teenagers who took cover in the gymnasium. As the tornado enveloped the school, a vacuum of air threatened to pull students into the eye of the tornado. “My son told us the lights went off and they could hear the noise of objects hitting the gym building,” David Ellis said. “The roof was ripped off the gym, and Diane, who was next to Dylan began to be sucked up in the air. My son laid on her to hold her down while holding onto a locker. Debris then began to fall; he pushed her out of the way and was hit in the back with debris, but thankfully didn’t suffer any major injuries.”

“I felt like the wind around me was in circles and the ground wasn’t underneath me any more,” Lee later told a CNN reporter. “He (Dylan Ellis) held onto my hand and then jumped on top of me.”

In the aftermath of the tornado, SourceAmerica™ President and CEO Bob Chamberlin issued a statement saying, “As the affected communities begin the difficult process of rebuilding and recovering from the destruction and tragedy that these storms have left behind, be assured that the broader SourceAmerica community will do its part. Our regional teams are monitoring the affected contracts and related employment issues for the AbilityOne employees.”

The May 20 tornado was a mile wide and packed winds moving up to 200 mph. It killed dozens of people as it flattened entire neighborhoods during 40 terrifying minutes of destruction across southern Oklahoma City and its suburbs. Hundreds of people were injured, including some 60 children. Catastrophic damage occurred in the city of Moore. In addition to hitting Highland East June High School, two elementary schools were destroyed and 10 children were killed. The pain and suffering caused by this tragic event was felt across the nation and by all AbilityOne participating agencies. ■