

Tragedy: Building “Community” out of adversity



This month's message by Council Member Barry Joffe

In the early hours of April 9th 1999, the storm which had originated in the Louisville, KY area produced its worst devastation as it moved northeast across Hamilton County developing into an F4 tornado that wreaked damage and destruction in Montgomery. Homes were destroyed or heavily damaged and four persons lost their lives.

Moving stories were recounted at the recent commemoration of

the 10th anniversary of the tornado. St. Barnabas Church — the operations center and volunteer registration site to cover Montgomery, Symmes and Sycamore Townships in 1999 — was a fitting venue for the commemoration ceremony.

I recall an eerie quality to the start of that April day in 1999. My neighborhood was thankfully untouched by the storm — the worst of it was that the power was out. All around was a dark silence, broken only by the flashing warning light of the alarm system which had defaulted to battery back-up. My son, then a high school senior, came to tell us there was

no school as a tornado had struck the high school area! He had just heard from one of his friends whose mom was on the school board. I had no idea at that time that the silence I experienced was so markedly contrasted by such devastation in other Montgomery neighborhoods.

We were all reminded at the commemoration ceremony how adversity, acts of caring, heroism, creative problem solving, selfless support and focus on the task at hand became the ingredients for rebuilding and cementing the community. How so many came together — neighbors, high

school students, other municipalities, prison workers, FEMA, City Council and the staff and the faith-based institutions — exemplified by cartoonist Jim Borgman's drawing of a number of hands clasped together and holding up each other with the statement “we're all in this together.”

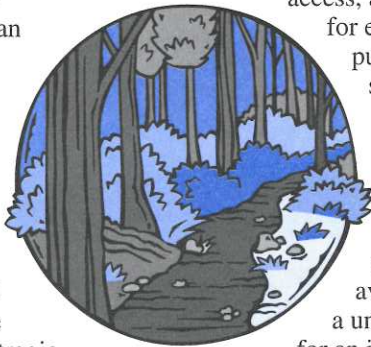
I witnessed another aspect of community through interfaith cooperation that came about as a result of the severe damage to the roof of Montgomery Community Baptist Church as it was then. Congregation Ohav Shalom had moved to their new facility on Cornell Road in Sycamore Township in August of the previous year. The synagogue suffered only minor roof damage and the sanctuary was quickly “converted” at the end of each Sabbath to enable the church to continue to hold Sunday services and Sunday school while their roof was being repaired. The two congregations marked their own Anniversary Service on April 9, 2000, in remembrance of the tornado and in celebration of G-d's gifts of friendship, healing and rebuilding — this time in the sanctuary of the church. The church planted and dedicated trees in the synagogue grounds in recognition of this friendship.

Like the 25th anniversary of the plane crash in Montgomery which took the lives of FBI agents and was commemorated last year as an important reminder of our local history, the commemoration of the tornado, particularly, serves as a reminder of the strength of community — and how an unexpected and disastrous event can help weave unique character. Let us not forget — we need to remind later generations of the fabric of this community!

This feature appears regularly, allowing Montgomery's elected officials to communicate directly with residents.

Residents encouraged to make lasting tribute at Johnson Nature Preserve

Montgomery residents can help make significant improvements to the entrance of the Johnson Nature Preserve and participate in a lasting memorial in honor of those impacted by the tragic 1999 tornado. Plans for the Preserve's entrance area include the addition of natural landscaping, pathways for easier



access, a defined space for educational purposes, and new signage to explain the wonders of this natural environment.

A variety of gifting options are available, including a unique opportunity for an individual sponsorship of the monument to be comprised of a brick pillar and bronze plaque as the centerpiece. Other options will

range between \$50 and \$1,500 and can be customized in both location and message:

Monument & Column

\$10,000 (Limit 1)

Landscape Bed & Bench

\$1500.00 (Limit 5)

Natural Bench *along nature path*

\$500.00 (Limit 8)

Memorial Brick Pavers (12"x12")

\$250 (Limit 50)

Personalized Brick Pavers (6"x8")

\$50 (Limit 250)

More information is available at Montgomery City Hall and at www.montgomeryohio.org.

Plans withdrawn for former dealerships

Bear Creek Capital has formally withdrawn its request for approval of a general development plan for the old Montgomery Chevrolet and Montgomery Ford sites near Cross County Highway. In an April 9 letter, Development Partner William Tippmann indicated that his organization has not been able to conclude

arrangements to gain control of the Montgomery Ford site. Such an agreement was a requirement by City Council in order to take action on a site plan which was reviewed by the Planning Commission.

Bear Creek still owns the former Montgomery Chevrolet site and is considering options for

another development for just that property. The owner of the Montgomery Ford dealership has now opened Lorinn's Used Vehicles on the former Ford dealership site.

Montgomery Ford closed last July after Ford negotiated a buy-back agreement for the dealership.