Operation Rising Eagle
A look into the first 72 hours
Donations flow in from across nation

Rising from the Rubble
Stories of strength and hope from the May 22, 2011 tornado

Joplin Schools
Rising from the Rubble

SUMMER 2011

Joplin Schools’ Mission
Investing in the future today by inspiring our students to pursue excellence.

Editor / Designer
LAUREN WHITE

Contributing Writers
MIAH ALLISON
TAYLOR CAMDEN
KYLIE DAVIS
MELANIE DOLLOFF
PEGGY FULLER
JENNA HERR
BRETT HOLCOMB
DR. C. J. HUFF
COLIN HUGHES
ASHLEY MICKLETHWAITE
ZACHERY PRICKETT
CARAVANA RANDALL
DANA SHADWICK

Contributing Photographers
LEXI BROWN
DANNY CRAVEN
MIKE DIROLL
MAKENDIE JONES
MICHAEL KILFOY
MIKE SAPP
KIM VANN
LAUREN WHITE

Special Thank You
TAMMY CADY
MARY CRANE

An addition worksheet lays crumpled on the ground after an EF5 tornado tore through half of the Joplin Schools’ buildings.

Katherin Grimes and Anthony Smith (left), of Illinois, and Leah Inwards, of Minnesota, volunteer their time to help Joplin Schools by stuffing backpacks with school supplies. Volunteer groups from across the nation have volunteered thousands of hours this summer to help prepare for the start of school on August 17.

An eagle carved from a damaged tree stands outside of Joplin High School Tuesday, June 14, 2011. The High School was one of several district facilities in the city destroyed or damaged by an EF5 tornado that wiped out much of the community on May 22, 2011.

Cover Image
An eagle carved from a damaged tree stands outside of Joplin High School Tuesday, June 14, 2011. The High School was one of several district facilities in the city destroyed or damaged by an EF5 tornado that wiped out much of the community on May 22, 2011.

Charlie Riedel/AP Photo
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 Letter from the Superintendent  
5 Critical moments  
7 Tornado brings catastrophic damage  
10 Distribution center aids community  
11 Letter from the Board President  
12 Operation Rising Eagle  
13 Teachers reach beyond classroom  
13 Meet your leadership team  
16 A heart for serving  
17 One-to-One Initiative  
17 Opening Day  
18 From the eyes of a volunteer  
19 Donations, big and small  
21 Bright Futures is here to stay  
22 Eagle strong, athletics  
23 Joplin Schools in the news
A message to the Joplin Schools community
We remain strong and will continue to provide a high quality education

On May 22, 2011, one of the strongest tornadoes in recorded history struck our community. One-third of the town was destroyed. Our schools were hit especially hard. Ten of our 20 buildings were destroyed or suffered damage. The losses, by our human understanding, remain unimaginable.

As time progressed, simple survival gave way to future planning and hope. “Eagle Strong” became the buzzword for Joplin Schools and for our entire community. Two days after the tornado, we made the announcement that school would open on time on August 17. This was critical. It gave hope. It reassured parents that their children would still receive a high quality education. It gave a goal for everyone to work towards.

Administrators, teachers, parents, students, community members, and volunteers rolled up their sleeves and went to work. Today, new buildings have risen and a spirit of pride and achievement permeates every classroom, library and school activity in this district.

The first thing you need to know about the start of this school year is that “excellence, commitment and inspiration” continue to be the hallmark characteristics of Joplin Schools.

Although we had over 3,000 students who lived in the path of that storm, over 90 percent of our students returned to class. Students and teachers have the supplies they need. Music, fine arts and sports programs will operate as usual. Support services for students, parents and teachers are all in place.

Joplin Schools is now emerging from the rubble left by the disastrous tornado with plans for the construction of high quality schools. More importantly, we continue on our mission to provide all students with the finest education possible in Missouri with a support system that is second-to-none in the nation. Joplin is set to ensure that every child receives the basic equipment, adult support and community guidance he/she needs to graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge for future success.

This is not just idle talk for Joplin. Last year, Bright Futures Joplin, a program designed to improve the district’s graduation rate and better connect the community to individual students and their needs, was launched. The National School Board Association gave Bright Futures Joplin the Magna Award, its most prestigious award used to recognize the most innovative school improvement initiatives in the nation.

In just one year, Bright Futures, combined with other district initiatives, contributed to a 51 percent reduction in the dropout rate. Students with needs as basic as food, shelter, glasses, beds, coats, shoes, etc., were identified and served, often in less than 24 hours. Most importantly, even before the tornado, Joplin was a school district focused directly on the needs and nurturing of its children.

This fall, parents can expect their children to return to a school district that is continuing to move forward regardless of the tragedy we have faced. Innovative programming around the best research-based practices will continue to be a hallmark of the Joplin Schools.

Finally, we want to say thanks for the outpouring of support and care from so many individuals, businesses, organizations, churches and volunteers. Joplin Schools is coming back better and stronger than ever before because of your commitment to the children of this community. We look forward to welcoming our students, parents, teachers, staff and community back to school and are excited about what the future holds for the Joplin Schools.

MaKenzie Jones/Joplin Junior

Dr. C. J. Huff holds an emotional press conference outside of the destroyed high school.

“We will have school on August 17th”

Dr. C. J. Huff holds an emotional press conference outside of the destroyed high school.

Dr. C. J. Huff
Superintendent of Joplin Schools
Critical moments: A look into the first 72 hours after the disaster

TAYLOR CAMDEN
Joplin Senior

For the 2011 graduating class of Joplin High School, May 22 was to be a day they would never forget; the day they would walk across the stage to receive their hard-earned diploma. Only minutes after the last student walked, a tornado began to form west of Joplin that would tear through the town and devastate thousands of buildings and structures, including many within the Joplin School District. May 22 will now always be remembered as the day an EF5 tornado came through Joplin.

In those first 72 hours after the storm, some of the most important decisions and some of the most incredible work was completed to address the major needs of Joplin Schools. This was accomplished through the incredible teamwork displayed by school administrators and leadership. Two men to thank for helping make it all happen are district superintendent, Dr. C.J. Huff, and JHS head principal, Dr. Kerry Sachetta, who have incredible stories to tell.

JHS Head Principal Kerry Sachetta

Dr. Kerry Sachetta was at Missouri Southern, and along with his secretary, Sheri Wilson, was gathering things to take back to the high school when the storm hit. Event staff led them to a shelter. Around 6:15 PM when the rain had subsided, Sachetta began getting text messages from teachers and faculty concerning the condition of Franklin Technology Center and Joplin High School.

“I didn’t expect to be reading those words,” said Sachetta. “I honestly didn’t believe it.”

As Sachetta was driving back home, he came up 20th Street and saw the devastation. He got out of his car and walked around the school and to the practice fields in the west, where he saw the large fire that engulfed Franklin Tech.

“I was in total awe. I thought ‘Can we fix this?’ The more I thought about it, the more I was unsure (whether we could).”

For the next few hours, Sachetta walked around nearby neighborhoods helping people dig through the rubble and look for loved ones — including the daughter of a Joplin High School teacher, who was fortunately found to be alive. Around 9:00 PM, Sachetta drove back to his home.

“A thousand things run through your mind. You don’t know what to think, or who to call,” said Sachetta.

Sachetta answered calls from media, such as BBC, ABC, FOX, and the Associated Press, wanting eyewitness accounts. He did this all night, helping to get the word out to people all across America of the destruction Joplin had experienced.

The next morning, after hardly sleeping, Sachetta drove to the new command center for Joplin Schools; North Middle School. There, district administrators and staff began working on trying to find ways to locate and account for all the students, teachers and faculty in the district.

“It was a difficult task. Facebook made a huge difference; most of our students were accounted for this way,” said Sachetta.

According to Sachetta, the first week went by very quickly. Throughout that time, the ultimate goal was to figure out how to get Joplin schools up and running by August 17. Sachetta wanted to get students back to a sense of normalcy, and to help people deal with their losses.

Superintendent Dr. C. J. Huff

Dr. C. J. Huff was driving home from graduation on Shiffer-decker Road when the storm hit. At first, he was not too concerned. Soon enough trees surrounding him began to fall. Once home, he and his wife waited out the storm in their basement. The Huffs were fearful of their lives, but thankfully only suffered minor roof damage and a broken car window.

Once they went outside and saw the damage, Huff knew he needed to get out and help. Putting on a pair of work boots and gloves, he and his family drove out to the damaged parts of town. The first thing they saw was St. Johns/Mercy Hospital. As he continued driving, Huff says the scenes got worse and worse. He sent his wife home and walked the distance to his office to retrieve his laptop and a few other things.

Huff then began receiving messages about district school buildings that had been hit.

continued on page 6
"I suddenly realized I wasn’t going to be able to run around town and help people, and that I was going to have to step up as Superintendent of Joplin Schools and make tough decisions,” said Huff.

Huff hitched a ride to the emergency command center. He quickly began making all of Joplin Schools’ resources available to the City of Joplin. Buses to transport people and buildings for shelter were made available that night.

The next day the leadership team met to establish a plan to locate and account for all students, teachers and faculty of Joplin Schools. Accounting for all students and staff was a logical first priority. “We are a family. Just like every other family in Joplin, our first priority was to find our family members.” In addition, structural engineers began damage assessments for all the buildings that had been hit.

On Monday night, Huff was unable to rest as thoughts of destruction and devastation lay heavy on his heart, keeping him from sleep.

“We lost half of our buildings; 4,200 students didn’t have a school to return to the next day. There were 86 days until the next school year would begin. I thought, ‘Can we do this?’” said Huff.

The next day Huff announced that Joplin would begin school as scheduled on August 17. He continues to be dedicated to making sure the students of Joplin Schools continue to receive a high quality education.

The district’s biggest challenge has been finding space for all the students. The leaders of the administration “hit it hard” according to Huff, and quickly found buildings big enough to house the large amount of students who no longer had a school to attend.

“I originally wanted juniors and seniors to attend Memorial and to have freshmen and sophomores attend the school at the mall. I wanted our seniors to feel like they graduated from a high school. But I’m very proud of the way the mall set-up has worked out. It really looks like a school,” said Huff.

Joplin Schools is not cutting any programs due to the recent tornado, and we have actually added a few. The schools are gaining a 21st Century learning environment that they did not have before. According to Huff, the Joplin School District has not taken a step back, but taken a step forward.

“We lost seven great kids and a staff member of Joplin Schools. We owe it to them to make the very best out of the situation at hand. We’ve been working very hard to provide these kids a good, high quality education,” said Huff.
At 5:41 p.m. on Sunday, May 22, Joplin, Missouri was struck by a horrific EF5 tornado. The Joplin area schools suffered casualties and major facility damage.

Without hesitation, Joplin Schools began responding.

People first

“Our first priority was to account for all of our family,” said Dr. C. J. Huff, Superintendent of Joplin Schools.

Working as a team, teachers, staff and volunteers began to account for the status of each and every student and staff member. By the end of the first week, everyone was accounted for. Reality was hard to bear. Seven students and one Joplin Schools staff member were lost.

Thousands of homes were lost or damaged. Over 3000 students lived in the path of the destruction and 54% of students were without a school to attend the next day.

Recognizing an increased need, the district has provided extra counseling staff for the upcoming school year and provided training opportunities for teachers to help them better recognize children in need.

The numbers

- 10 buildings damaged
- 260+ Classrooms lost
- 54% of students without a school to attend
- 3,000+ students in living in the tornado’s path

Physical damage

The damage to our schools was significant. Words cannot adequately describe the mountain of difficulties Joplin Schools faced to repair or find new meeting places for the students of all the damaged buildings. The following pictures can begin to show the extent of the damage the district received.

View images of the damaged buildings on pages 8-9
Franklin Technology Center is considered a total loss.

(Above) The Roi S. Wood Administration Building suffered significant damage.

Kelsey Norman Elementary and Duquesne Elementary suffered minor damage.

(Right) Joplin High School is considered a total loss.
The former South Middle School will most likely be considered a total loss. Emerald Elementary suffered damage but official status is still pending further investigation. East Middle School is considered a total loss. (Right) Cecil Floyd Elementary suffered significant damage. The former South Middle School will most likely be considered a total loss.
After the May 22nd tornado, there was a desperate need for the very basic supplies of food, water, clothing and shelter. Joplin Schools, along with the rest of the city, was heavily damaged by the storm. However, many volunteers united to form a distribution center at North Middle School to help get supplies to those who needed them.

“I am not sure that any of it was actually ‘official’ – it sort of just came to be,” said Jill Flakne, principal of Royal Heights Elementary. Flakne headed up the distribution center along with the help of many volunteers. “I remember taking a shift on the phones on Monday or Tuesday and asking the caller if they needed anything, and the answer was ‘yes.’” There was a need for a distribution center and North Middle School seemed like the perfect location.

Rather than answering another call, Flakne started asking around the office about supplies and getting them to the people that needed them. Then calls started coming in offering places to stay, food, water and transportation. Trucks from around Missouri filled with supplies began to drop them off at the newly formed distribution center. The center stayed open for approximately one week to the public, two weeks for district employees and some supplies were stored to be used throughout the upcoming school year.

“This wasn’t glamorous work and it wasn’t out in the ‘field’ – it was sorting shoes and clothing by size, food by type, marking boxes, and labeling bags,” said Flakne.

According to Flakne, roughly 100 volunteers helped to make sure they were able to pull it off. Also, people’s flexibility and patience with an unperfected system made it possible to get necessary items to far more people, as well as keep everything organized.

“One of the teens that came to help got involved in sorting and organizing, got a little comfortable and slipped out of his shoes,” said Flakne, recalling the story of one volunteer helped. “A few hours later he was searching everywhere for those sandals and then we realized if they weren’t on his feet, they probably became a kind-hearted donation for someone with no shoes. Luckily, we had a pile of shoes in his size so he picked a new pair.”

Thanks to the help of the dozens of volunteers, the district was able to help provide supplies to the people affected by the storm. “Amidst a tragedy, it was a great experience and I learned a lot about myself and about the strength of my district,” said Flakne.
Keeping our children the top priority
Teamwork and decisive action lay groundwork for bright future

Dear Members of the Joplin Schools Community,

The past few months have been a challenging time for our entire community. We have struggled, we have cried, but we have also hugged each other, made new friends, learned to humbly accept the outpouring of support from around the country and rolled up our sleeves and done very hard work. I have never been more proud of our Joplin community and the Joplin Schools community than I am now.

Dr. C. J. Huff and his team have been simply amazing. There has been no question and no flinching in their direction; first and foremost to determine the safety and well-being of our students, staff and families, and then make plans for school to open on August 17. Working hand-in-hand with the Board of Education, quick, but well-researched decisions have been made. Having school open on time is essential to the long-term recovery of our community.

The Board of Education set five priorities on which every decision would be based: (1) Children, (2) School employees, (3) Community, (4) Education, and (5) Facilities.

Children are and will be our number one priority. Their health, safety, basic needs and educational needs now and in the future are at the forefront of our decisions.

Without our tremendous staff, I’m not sure where we would be. So many of you have volunteered your time and talent this summer…thank you! The Board of Education and administration want to make sure that your needs are met and that you have the tools and support you need to provide for our children.

We believe schools are the heart of the community. If we can help our community as a school district, we should, and we do. We’ve provided transportation to thousands of volunteers throughout the summer. We also decided to not only start summer school, but expand summer school to offer transportation. This was a challenge for us, but it was the right thing to do for the community and for our children.

Of course education is always a top priority. Some may ask why it isn’t the number one priority. Our belief is that if the basic needs of our children, employees and community are not met, then meaningful education cannot occur.

The devastation to our schools is heart breaking, but it is also an opportunity. We can rebuild schools to meet the needs of 21st century learners. We can also improve the schools we have to not only meet identified needs prior to the storm but also make them safer in the future.

As the Board of Education has made big decisions recently, I hope you understand these priorities were at the forefront of those decisions. You may wonder why we moved certain schools to certain locations. Our philosophy was that we wanted to keep children with the friends and teachers they knew to the best of our ability given our challenge of finding suitable locations for 54% of our student enrollment.

As the school year begins, we are filled with both excitement and some apprehension. We know you are too. We will do everything we can to ensure this school year is the best school year ever. If you have questions or concerns, please let us know. We will have challenges to overcome and obstacles to hurdle. In community, we can accomplish seemingly impossible deeds. We have already with your support!

Sincerely,
ASHLEY MICKLETHWAITE
Board of Education President
Years of Service: 2007-Present

Board of Education

JIM KIMBROUGH
Vice President
Years of Service: 2006-Present

ANNE SHARP
Board Member
Years of Service: 2000-Present

MICHAEL D. LANDIS
Board Member
Years of Service: 2001-Present

RANDY STEELE
Board Member
Years of Service: 2008-Present

JEFF FLOWERS
Board Member
Years of Service: 2008-Present

PHIL WILCOXON
Board Member
Years of Service: 2008-Present

RISING FROM THE RUBBLE
Joplin Schools

The May 22nd tornado did substantial damage to the city of Joplin as well as its public school district. However, district officials say they aren’t giving up. “[We plan to] continue to make progress on every front by engaging our community at a much deeper level in the educational process and life of our schools,” said Dr. CJ Huff, Superintendent of Joplin Schools.

Damage to the district has been estimated to be $150 million, damaging several buildings including Joplin High School (JHS), Franklin Technology Center (FTC), East Middle School, Irving Elementary School, Duquesne Elementary School, Emerson Elementary School and others. According to the Joplin Schools website, JHS, FTC, East Middle School and Irving are total losses, while the former South Middle School will most likely be considered a total loss and Emerson still needs to be investigated further. The rest of the damaged district buildings were deemed repairable.

The district’s plan to start school on time on August 17, known as Operation Rising Eagle, went into full effect with leasing and remodeling necessary facilities, as well as relocating students of the affected schools to different campuses. Administrators looked for buildings that were either not in use or had room to spare for the extra students.

“It was like putting together a puzzle with your eyes closed and a few pieces missing,” stated Huff. “It was very challenging for us to not only find the square footage needed to have school this fall, but to consider other options for existing programs unaffected by the storm to help make the pieces fit together.”

The overall curriculum for the schools, according to Huff, will be changing. The goal is to help students prepare for a work environment by integrating technology and promoting traits such as entrepreneurship, effective communication, adaptability, critical thinking, problem solving and leadership.

“How we have done business in public education for the last century is not going to carry us forward as a nation in the 21st century and beyond,” said Huff. “We have an opportunity to lead the way and, quite frankly, a responsibility to our students to make every effort to ensure they are prepared to assume their place in the work force and the world in which we live.”

Operation Rising Eagle: Rebuilding a school district in just eight-six days

BRETT HOLCOMB
Joplin Sophomore

The May 22nd tornado did substantial damage to the city of Joplin as well as its public school district. However, district officials say they aren’t giving up. “[We plan to] continue to make progress on every front by engaging our community at a much deeper level in the educational process and life of our schools,” said Dr. CJ Huff, Superintendent of Joplin Schools.

Damage to the district has been estimated to be $150 million, damaging several buildings including Joplin High School (JHS), Franklin Technology Center (FTC), East Middle School, Irving Elementary School, Duquesne Elementary School, Emerson Elementary School and others. According to the Joplin Schools website, JHS, FTC, East Middle School and Irving are total losses, while the former South Middle School will most likely be considered a total loss and Emerson still needs to be investigated further. The rest of the damaged district buildings were deemed repairable.

The district’s plan to start school on time on August 17, known as Operation Rising Eagle, went into full effect with leasing and remodeling necessary facilities, as well as relocating students of the affected schools to different campuses. Administrators looked for buildings that were either not in use or had room to spare for the extra students.

“It was like putting together a puzzle with your eyes closed and a few pieces missing,” stated Huff. “It was very challenging for us to not only find the square footage needed to have school this fall, but to consider other options for existing programs unaffected by the storm to help make the pieces fit together.”

The overall curriculum for the schools, according to Huff, will be changing. The goal is to help students prepare for a work environment by integrating technology and promoting traits such as entrepreneurship, effective communication, adaptability, critical thinking, problem solving and leadership.

“How we have done business in public education for the last century is not going to carry us forward as a nation in the 21st century and beyond,” said Huff. “We have an opportunity to lead the way and, quite frankly, a responsibility to our students to make every effort to ensure they are prepared to assume their place in the work force and the world in which we live.”
Meet your leadership team

Dr. C. J. Huff
Superintendent

My job is fairly simple. I try to help everyone involved with Joplin Schools be successful. I lead a team of amazing people who make sure all the students are learning and cared for, the teachers and staff are the best in the business and the community is involved and knowledgeable about their schools. The Board of Education expects me to use money efficiently, maintain our facilities, make transparent decisions and, above all, make sure all students are in safe learning environments where teachers can teach and children can learn. Since the storm my job has been more complex, but at the end of the day it is still all about children, schools and learning. We owe it to the legacy of those who lost their lives in the storm to rebuild and be stronger than we were before.

The cohesiveness of our team has been phenomenal. Everyone has done their part to carry the load of what many have described as an impossible task. It just goes to show what dedication, hard work and resiliency can accomplish when faced with a seemingly insurmountable challenge. I couldn’t be more proud of our school family. Everyone has worked together to do the right thing for our kids and community. We are poised to have an outstanding year.

Dr. Angie Besendorfer
Assistant Superintendent

So many people who don’t even know us have come to our aid. It means more to our school community than they can ever guess.

I am excited to prove that Joplin Schools and the community can come together after a tragedy to ensure our kids receive a high quality education that prepares students for their best future.

As Assistant Superintendent, previously I was responsible for the areas of school related to teaching, learning and personnel. My duties have expanded quite a bit post-tornado; however, it has been a real team effort. Early on, I became a real estate negotiator as we located space to have school. I have also expanded my involvement in buildings and construction including working with FEMA and the U.S. Corp of Engineers. Overall, with so much to do, Dr. Huff and I are both operating in all areas and working very closely together to coordinate all the decisions that need to be made to get school started.

continued on page 18
In good or bad economic times, we owe it to our students, parents and staff to make the best use of limited resources.

Paul Barr
Chief Financial Officer

As Chief Financial Officer, I supervise the Joplin Schools budget, accounting, human resources, risk management (commercial insurance), central copy center and cash management. I am the “numbers” person.

My hope is that Joplin Schools can take this terrible tragedy and key on the opportunity to make aggressive and game-changing advancements in the education of our kids.

Traci House
Director of Technology

I handle all things technology. Since the tornado, I have focused on ordering and replacing damaged/destroyed technology, including classroom and network infrastructure; coordinating with the building technology specialists on site relocation, as well as setup and installation of software and hardware.

Because there was a mutual respect and trust already built among the leadership team members, the tragedy of May 22nd has only strengthened our relationships. There is not only a strong sense of support, but also a feeling of “keeping an eye on each other” or “I’ve got your back,” as certain days can often carry more stress than others.

I handle parent complaints for the district, intradistrict transfers, field trips, school calendar, safety, instructional capital outlay and long-term suspension/discipline hearings, among other jobs.

Since the tornado, my role has changed significantly. I have the exciting challenge of outfitting all the damaged and destroyed buildings with furniture and with assisting teachers in replacing important curricular equipment relevant to what they teach. It is different to start fresh on something like this. It makes us realize how much we take for granted in our daily lives and routines. I also helped coordinate furniture moving with all the shuffling that has taken place. In addition to the bulk of the work, the time deadline changes how we do business, adding an urgency to all we do, because we want things to be great for when the kids come back to school. The reality is there is a lot to do, with little time. But, we are getting it done!

The future for Joplin Schools is exciting. We’ve experienced a great tragedy together that has made us stronger than we already were before May 22nd. Our lives have been touched by the support of each other and from across the nation. We will continue moving forward and leading the way in educating our kids.

Terri Hart
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Coordinator

I work with teachers and principals in several capacities to make sure our students get the best education in the nation. I help to ensure that we have a solid and consistent curriculum that is delivered in ways that research indicates is best practice and has the highest impact on student success. This involves professional development, looking at what is being taught at each grade level in comparison to what is expected to be taught according to state and federal standards, making adjustments to curriculum and implementing new programs throughout the district. Typically in the summer, my focus would be to facilitate and coordinate professional development and learning for the teachers.

Since the tornado, my job has been to make sure our teachers and students have the resources and materials they had prior to May 22nd. We may have 3 years of rebuilding ahead of us, but our students deserve the same high quality education they were receiving prior to the tornado.
I am responsible for communication with the public, relationships with the media, volunteer coordination, friendship building for Joplin Schools, coordinating the Bright Futures program and, the all-important, “other duties as assigned.” After the tornado my work days were consumed with media requests, volunteer coordination, donation coordination and strategic planning on an enormous scale. I now also serve as a liaison to volunteer and institutional organizations working in Joplin with the recovery and rebuilding efforts.

Mark Barlass
Assistant Director of Special Services

I am the newest addition to the Joplin Schools leadership team, having reported to work on July 1st as the Assistant Director of Special Services. As an assistant director, I have been given the privilege of overseeing the special education, Title III, homeless and migrant programs. I also assist with other federal programs under the direction of Lisa Orem, Director of Special Services.

Having not been here at the onset to witness the dynamics of the leadership team, I can only attest to what I have observed since coming on board. I must admit that I was initially concerned with what to expect. Having accepted the position before May 22nd, I was left wondering how it was going to impact my transition into the team. However, immediately into my first leadership meeting, as I observed the team at work, I affirmed to myself that I was where I wanted to be. This is a special group.

Oliver Wendell Holmes said something like, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” This quote exemplifies the spirit of Joplin Schools, and I am proud to be part of this staff and the community of Joplin.

Kim Vann
Director of Community Development

I am responsible for communication with the public, relationships with the media, volunteer coordination, friendship building for Joplin Schools, coordinating the Bright Futures program and, the all-important, “other duties as assigned.” After the tornado my work days were consumed with media requests, volunteer coordination, donation coordination and strategic planning on an enormous scale. I now also serve as a liaison to volunteer and institutional organizations working in Joplin with the recovery and rebuilding efforts.

This has truly been one of the most rewarding, as well as humbling, experiences in which I have been professionally involved.

Mark Barlass
Assistant Director of Special Services

I am the newest addition to the Joplin Schools leadership team, having reported to work on July 1st as the Assistant Director of Special Services. As an assistant director, I have been given the privilege of overseeing the special education, Title III, homeless and migrant programs. I also assist with other federal programs under the direction of Lisa Orem, Director of Special Services.

Having not been here at the onset to witness the dynamics of the leadership team, I can only attest to what I have observed since coming on board. I must admit that I was initially concerned with what to expect. Having accepted the position before May 22nd, I was left wondering how it was going to impact my transition into the team. However, immediately into my first leadership meeting, as I observed the team at work, I affirmed to myself that I was where I wanted to be. This is a special group.

Oliver Wendell Holmes said something like, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” This quote exemplifies the spirit of Joplin Schools, and I am proud to be part of this staff and the community of Joplin.

Kim Vann
Director of Community Development

I am responsible for communication with the public, relationships with the media, volunteer coordination, friendship building for Joplin Schools, coordinating the Bright Futures program and, the all-important, “other duties as assigned.” After the tornado my work days were consumed with media requests, volunteer coordination, donation coordination and strategic planning on an enormous scale. I now also serve as a liaison to volunteer and institutional organizations working in Joplin with the recovery and rebuilding efforts.

This has truly been one of the most rewarding, as well as humbling, experiences in which I have been professionally involved.

Mark Barlass
Assistant Director of Special Services

I am the newest addition to the Joplin Schools leadership team, having reported to work on July 1st as the Assistant Director of Special Services. As an assistant director, I have been given the privilege of overseeing the special education, Title III, homeless and migrant programs. I also assist with other federal programs under the direction of Lisa Orem, Director of Special Services.

Having not been here at the onset to witness the dynamics of the leadership team, I can only attest to what I have observed since coming on board. I must admit that I was initially concerned with what to expect. Having accepted the position before May 22nd, I was left wondering how it was going to impact my transition into the team. However, immediately into my first leadership meeting, as I observed the team at work, I affirmed to myself that I was where I wanted to be. This is a special group.

Oliver Wendell Holmes said something like, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” This quote exemplifies the spirit of Joplin Schools, and I am proud to be part of this staff and the community of Joplin.

Kim Vann
Director of Community Development

I am responsible for communication with the public, relationships with the media, volunteer coordination, friendship building for Joplin Schools, coordinating the Bright Futures program and, the all-important, “other duties as assigned.” After the tornado my work days were consumed with media requests, volunteer coordination, donation coordination and strategic planning on an enormous scale. I now also serve as a liaison to volunteer and institutional organizations working in Joplin with the recovery and rebuilding efforts.

This has truly been one of the most rewarding, as well as humbling, experiences in which I have been professionally involved.

Mark Barlass
Assistant Director of Special Services

I am the newest addition to the Joplin Schools leadership team, having reported to work on July 1st as the Assistant Director of Special Services. As an assistant director, I have been given the privilege of overseeing the special education, Title III, homeless and migrant programs. I also assist with other federal programs under the direction of Lisa Orem, Director of Special Services.

Having not been here at the onset to witness the dynamics of the leadership team, I can only attest to what I have observed since coming on board. I must admit that I was initially concerned with what to expect. Having accepted the position before May 22nd, I was left wondering how it was going to impact my transition into the team. However, immediately into my first leadership meeting, as I observed the team at work, I affirmed to myself that I was where I wanted to be. This is a special group.
A heart for serving: Volunteer shares story of dedication and survival

JENNA HERR & DANA SHADWICK
Joplin Junior Joplin Teacher

April 6, 2011 was a day Joanne Wills will never forget. After visiting with friends and enjoying a meal at the Bright Futures Joplin breakfast, she was very shocked and surprised to hear her name announced as the Bright Futures Volunteer of the Year. Her hands were shaking as she accepted her award, and she declined to speak to the crowd for fear she would cry.

This lovely lady was well deserving of the award, as she unselfishly arrives at 6 AM daily at West Central Elementary (before the teachers), as well as spending some late nights, to assist the teachers and children in any way she can and has done for 10 years! Wills later told teachers at West Central that she had never been recognized for anything in her life.

This is the first year for the award to be given. It provides recognition to an individual whose efforts make a difference in the lives of many citizens on a daily basis.

“Winning this award was quite a shock. I never thought too much about my volunteering being that notable. It is a great honor and I am very proud,” said Wills.

Wills has lived in Joplin for 81 years and started volunteering 11 years ago when her husband passed away. Volunteering is the way she keeps busy and meets new people.

“I first started when a teacher at Irving Elementary asked me to help in her classroom. It got me out of the house and I was so fascinated by the kids’ energy,” said Wills. She transferred to West Central Elementary School two years later alongside the teacher, and has become a tremendous asset there as well.

“At West Central, I help put up bulletin boards, laminate, and run errands up and down the halls. Whatever the teachers need to have done and I am able to do, I do it,” said Wills.

During the school year, Wills gets to the school before the teachers and often stays until 11:30 PM. Wills is not only appreciated by the West Central family, but she also gives back appreciation to all the staff members for their hard work and dedication to their job.

“I don’t think people realize how much teachers do. They spend a lot of their personal time at meetings and with their students, so they deserve all the help they can get,” said Wills.

“The teachers are my best friends and the kids always brighten my day. I get so much joy out of volunteering.”

However, Wills has also experienced the receiving end of volunteer work since the devastating tornado. Along with many other Joplin residents, Wills’ own home was in the path of the EF-5 tornado.

On May 22, Mrs. Wills was in her home on Highview Street looking out her west window at the trees whipping around her back yard. Her grandson, Donald, who lives with her, grabbed her and yelled, “Grandma, it is a tornado!” They ran to the interior bathroom and were just starting to get on the floor, when the house crashed in around them, knocking them to the floor. Amazingly, with only minor injuries, Mrs. Wills and her grandson crawled out of the debris. A passerby picked the pair up in his vehicle and drove them to her nephew’s house for the evening. Mrs. Wills escaped wearing only her pajamas, but was grateful she had on her hearing aids and glasses. That evening she commented to her family that there were only 3 things that she hoped to retrieve, a lovely ring her husband had given her before his death, his war medals and her Bright Futures award.

The next morning, Mrs. Wills, Donald and family members returned to the devastated house in hopes of retrieving some personal articles. Amazingly, Mrs. Wills’ jewelry box was intact with her jewelry inside. The box containing Mr. Wills’ war medals had been stored in her attic was found with his awards inside! Her precious Bright Futures Award, a glass plaque, was found inside the house. It had been thrown across a room and had only a small chip in the corner. Mrs. Wills was overjoyed that the EF5 tornado was unable to take away her most valued possessions! Although the tornado has affected her life in many ways, Wills continues to keep her positive attitude as Joplin is restored.

continued on page 18
After the May 22 tornado, Joplin High School has had to make many changes and decisions with the new school year approaching. This includes the decision to switch from our reliance on textbooks to laptops to access information in the classroom.

“There are far more resources out there on the web than there are in some textbooks. So it doesn’t make much sense to spend money on textbooks when you can get more current information on the web,” said Dr. C. J. Huff, Superintendent of Joplin Schools.

The laptop program, called the One-to-One Initiative, has already been implemented in many other schools. Discussion regarding the One-to-One Initiative at JHS started three years ago.

“We have visited schools that have been doing One-to-One successfully on a number of occasions. The biggest obstacle was funding the start up cost of the program. There have been several generous donations since the tornado that allowed us to move forward with this initiative,” said Huff.

JHS has not only moved forward in technology, but due to the addition of the student laptops, new teaching strategies will also be necessary.

continued on page 20

(Left) Teacher of the Year Gala Moss is greeted by Governor Jay Nixon before addressing the audience at Opening Day. (Center) The JHS band plays the fight song for Joplin Schools employees. (Right) Community members held signs and cheered outside of Taylor Auditorium before the Opening Day program.
From the eyes of a volunteer

In the aftermath of the tornado that dramatically impacted so many in Joplin, I learned that one’s hometown is not necessarily defined by where you were born, where you grew up or even where you spent the last ten years. As a transplant, I considered myself lucky to have established a number of great friendships among lifelong Joplin residents - essentially adopted into their extended families and their deep roots in the town. Joplin was my home, but I still felt a little like a guest. If there is a bright spot out of the disaster for me, it is the sense of community that I gained through my involvement with Joplin Schools over the last three months.

I knew from my previous work with Bright Futures that damage to so many facilities and the surrounding neighborhoods would create a huge challenge for the school district. The first week following the tornado is a blur, but I remember showing up at the temporary command center on May 24th hoping to lend a hand. I never imagined so many people would come together to make sure that temporary arrangements were in place to allow schools to open on time (a mere 86 days) and, ultimately, that our schools would emerge stronger than ever. I've been overwhelmed by the generosity of our local community and the dedication of Dr. Huff and his team.

I spent my summer working with individuals, corporations, and even a foreign country to help fill the needs of the Joplin school district and our students. Celebrities, such as Sheryl Crow, Keith Urban, and Charles Barkley, and companies, including Office Depot, Coca-Cola, and Lowe’s, have donated time and money to help the cause. Most inspiring, however, are the ordinary people from around the country showing extraordinary determination and resourcefulness. One group drove a truck from Pennsylvania, arriving at the office unexpectedly to deliver school supplies and band instruments. Two women drove from Kansas City with a hundred dollars that they collected at their church the previous day. Other families canceled vacations to fly to Joplin and volunteer for whatever needed to be done.

I plan to take a little vacation after school starts, but you can bet that I’ll be back to volunteer for my hometown school in a month or two.

MELANIE DOLLOFF
Joplin Volunteer

Teachers continued from page 13

chemistry teacher Nathan Mutic has made a significant difference in the lives of several people who lost everything, especially Mutic’s new friend, Eddy.

After the tornado, Mutic’s church was involved in a variety of assistance to storm victims, including providing shelter to those who lost their homes. Mutic provided housing for several people on a short-term basis.

“I think I have touched the life of my new friend, Eddy, who we took in after the tornado... I think he really has appreciated the help,” said Mutic. “Knowing that I have been able to help out and do my part is very fulfilling.”

These teachers, turned volunteers, have a little advice to give to those who want to help. Mutic believes that as the next year unfolds, the people of Joplin should continue to look for opportunities to help, because many people will need assistance with the rebuilding effort. White would like people to know that volunteering can have long-lasting benefits. “In life, you will never regret the help that you give to others,” she said. Hallmark says to be patient, sensitive to the fact that the debris used to be someone’s home, be kind, and to bring sunscreen and water.

If anything good can be found in the aftermath of this disaster, it has been the widespread, kind help given to those who needed it.

Volunteer continued from page 16

After living with her sister in Pittsburg, KS for 5 weeks, Mrs. Wills and Donald are now living in a duplex in Joplin and plan to rebuild her home. She deeply appreciates and feels blessed to have a community that has embraced and cared for her!

“The teachers that I volunteer with have helped me, the church organizations have helped me. It is amazing how these volunteers put their lives on hold to help get this community back to normal,” said Wills.

People from all across the world have Joplin in their thoughts during this recent tragedy, and Wills has noticed how much of a difference these good Samaritans have made.

“I was surprised how far the volunteers had come, I don’t know what I would’ve done if it hadn’t been for them, and my friends and relatives that took charge and helped me out. It is amazing how everyone has gotten together to help get people started again,” said Wills.

As Wills searches for “the new normal” in her own life again, she is confident that Joplin will come back strong. She has been anxious for school to begin, so she can once again help the students and staff at West Central Elementary.
Rising from the Rubble

KYLIE DAVIS
Joplin Sophomore

Joplin Schools’ motto, “Proud of our past, shaping our future,” is becoming more than just words to the community as they work to rebuild the city and support others through the tough times.

In an effort to get Joplin Schools back up and running, Bright Futures has set up two programs to funnel donations directly to help students and teachers: Adopt-an-Eagle and Adopt-a-Classroom. The purpose of Adopt-an-Eagle is to help eliminate as much anxiety surrounding the first day of school as possible by providing each student with a backpack containing all of the grade specific supplies needed to start the year.

Adopt-a-Classroom is designed to help the teachers get ready. The May 22nd tornado caused devastation to more than 260 classrooms district-wide. Teachers accumulate supplies and decorations for their classrooms throughout their years of service. They purchase these items using their own finances. Since insurance does not cover personal items, these teachers were on their own to replace lost supplies. With Adopt-a-Classroom, interested donors work directly with a teacher to meet his or her specific classroom needs.

Polly Scoutaris, JHS graduate of 1960, decided to make Mary Crane’s, adviser of the journalism program, hopes become reality by adopting her classroom. After hearing about the Adopt a Classroom program from a friend, Scoutaris decided it was “the perfect opportunity to get involved.”

“I still feel like it is my school and I thought the best way to give back to Joplin would be through the schools,” she said.

Scoutaris has seen education be a key component to overcoming adversity, as witnessed first-hand when she travelled to volunteer in northern Russia shortly after the fall of communism 15 years ago.

“While there, it seemed to me the teachers I worked with had a strong sense of holding the community together. I believe that will be the same truth as Joplin teachers begin the year in this new environment,” she expressed.

While the City of Joplin has received donations from one dollar up to millions of dollars, the school district has also been the recipient of various donations and a variety of donors.

Donations for rebuilding efforts have come from corporations, such as a $25,000 check from Freeman Health System, as well as the Anderson Family Charitable Foundation, which donated $10,000, with another $12,500 contributed by supporters of that foundation.

Individuals have been creative in their efforts to raise money and supplies to help the district.

Molly Wedmaier, a fifth grade student from New Jersey, raised $1,400 by selling homemade duct tape bows. She is pictured here with Board of Education Vice President Jim Kimbrough (left) and board member Michael Landis.

David Humphreys, CEO of TAMKO, donated $500,000 to Joplin Schools to help with recovery and rebuilding.

A fifth grade student from Metuchen, New Jersey, donated $1,410 she raised by selling home-made duct tape bows. She is pictured here with Board of Education Vice President Jim Kimbrough (left) and board member Michael Landis.

A handful of toys was accompanied by a note from a child named Landon. It reads “hi my name is Landon I will give you some of my toys also I will give you ten juice paks.”

A fifth grade student from New Jersey, raised $1,400 by selling homemade duct tape bows. Megan Mettler, a 13-year-old from Santa Ana, CA, collected 3,000 books to benefit district libraries. Webb City students made and sold flower bows,

continued on page 20
It’s not as much about the technology as it is the instructional strategies used to incorporate the technology and information into the classroom,” said Huff.

Moving forward in technology by many is agreed to be the best decision for JHS, but will take time for students and staff to settle into the new environment.

“Although it will be an adjustment at first for students and teachers, eventually it will help us in so many ways. It is going to add a great deal of flexibility to our classes,” said Seth Wolfshorndal, art teacher at JHS.

A junior at JHS, Victoria Thompson, agrees and states, “I think it will bring our school up-to-date with the other schools. It will take some time getting used to it, but I’m sure it will be better for our school in the end.”

Students at JHS are ready to make the change to laptops.

“I think it would be the smartest thing they could do. In society today, you need to know how to work a computer. You can’t get a job without knowing how to work a computer. We are progressing faster and faster and if we don’t know how to use a computer we’ll be left behind,” said Michael Manley, senior at JHS.

One-to-One Initiative has worked in many other schools and is hoped to do the same at JHS.

“We hope that this initiative levels the playing field for students who don’t have 24/7 access to information, which in turn raises student achievement and performance,” said Huff.
Bright Futures is here to stay!

It’s hard to believe that Bright Futures is only 18 months old; born in April of 2010, introduced to the Joplin teachers and staff in August, growing and succeeding and making a difference throughout the 2010-2011 school year.

Bright Futures inspires people because it is all about the kids. Dr. Huff came to our district with a vision and the School Board supported that vision in their strategic planning. The original intent, formulated in a grant written by Debbie Markman with Economic Security Council, was to bring together the business community, the human services organizations and the faith-based community to provide resources to students in the Joplin R-8 school system who were “at risk” of dropping out. Often these students have issues that have nothing to do with their performance at school and everything to do with their life at home. They might be hungry, they might be sleeping on a dirt floor, they might not have a pair of shoes to wear to school. The idea was to meet the needs of these students immediately, without duplicating services, taking pressure off the schools and teachers, and allow these kids to go back to the business of being in school and learning. It’s hard to learn when you’re hungry.

This past school year saw hundreds of new partners involved in the schools, not just donating money and supplies, but actually spending time in the buildings, with the kids, having lunch, playing games, talking about their careers, reading books, and participating in the life of the school. Barriers came down and friendships were formed. Several of our neighboring communities asked us for advice and help in starting their own Bright Futures program. We were all thrilled with the growth and success of the initiative, and excited about the plans we had to take on new projects.

Then came May 22, 2011. At 5:41 PM that day, all of our plans suddenly changed. The terrible EF-5 tornado tore through our community, destroying three schools and severely damaging several others. More than 3400 of our 7700 students lived in its deadly path. Seven students and one educator lost their lives. It was a terrible, tragic day.

Just a few days after the tornado, Dr. Huff stood in front of the cameras and said with great confidence, “Joplin Schools will start on time this year, whatever it takes. Our kids will be back in school on August 17th.” It seemed like a gargantuan task, but with the help of hundreds of volunteers, and the generosity of people all over the world, Joplin Schools will indeed open on August 17th!

The goals of Bright Futures have not changed. Our mission remains the same: Partnerships inspiring educational achievement and developing community success. We know that we face years of recovery and rebuilding in our community and that our lives have been forever changed by that forceful EF-5. But we also rest assured in the knowledge that Joplin will rise above the challenges and will emerge an even better and stronger community. We are grateful beyond words that Bright Futures was already in place, the partnerships had been formed, and people were ready to go to work, within minutes after the storm, and make our community an example for the world to watch and admire.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts to all of the volunteers, teachers and staff of Joplin Schools. Together, we can turn to face the world and say, “Eagle Pride!”

PEGGY FULLER
Co-Chairman, Bright Futures Joplin
Vice President, Southwest Missouri Bank
Sunday May 22 started out like any other spring day. It was warm and a few clouds hung in the sky. When a storm rolled in and the tornado sirens went off, many residents of Joplin thought little of the warnings and continued on with their day. Little did many know what would soon be bearing down on the city. By six o’clock that evening, the entire city of Joplin was thrown into chaos. The condition of Joplin High School was the last thing on many residents’ minds as they rushed to save their neighbors from rubble that only minutes earlier made up their homes.

The destruction of the school seemed insignificant in the immediate aftermath of the tornado. However, as the school year grew closer and the focus turned to rebuilding, many had questions about the school, one of them being: Where will the athletic teams be holding their practices and playing their games next year?

The gym where volleyball and basketball games were once held is destroyed. The softball, soccer and baseball fields, littered with debris, are no longer in condition to be played on. JHS Athletic Director, Jeff Starkweather said that MSSU, the City of Joplin and many neighboring school districts have reached out and offered their facilities for the JHS teams to use during their school season.

Fall sports began practicing on August 8 with many teams practicing in different facilities than the last few years. Starkweather said that the volleyball team will practice and play at Memorial Middle

continued on page 23
Rising from the Rubble

School and possibly at Missouri Southern. The soccer team will practice at Missouri Southern and play games at the Joplin Athletic Complex.

According to head softball coach, Bruce VonderHaar, the softball team will practice and play its home games at Missouri Southern’s softball field, located behind Fred G. Hughes Stadium.

VonderHaar expressed that not having a field on the school campus poses some difficulties.

“Instead of walking out of our school and going right to our field, now we have to transport everyone to practice on a daily basis. For the girls who don’t drive that will be a process that will take some time to get used to. Also, having our team spread out across town during the school day is a little inconvenient. But everyone has to make sacrifices and we will get through it just fine,” he said.

Losing the field was not the only problem the softball team has had to deal with as their season quickly approaches. The team lost nearly all of its equipment.

“After the tornado, all we had left was two buckets of balls. One was at my house and the other with a player who was using it during the offseason,” VonderHaar said.

The heavy loss that the softball program has suffered has caught the attention of many opposing softball programs around the area. VonderHaar said that Blue Springs, Springdale Har-Ber and Columbia Hickman each had representatives drive to Joplin personally to donate both softball equipment and various other items to three girls who lost their homes. VonderHaar also added that Carthage Youth Softball has donated generously to Joplin.

“The amount of support has been amazing,” he said.

Softball is not the only sports program that has received assistance from opposing sports programs.

“We have had summer weights at Webb City and had some open gyms for volleyball at Webb City. And Carl Junction has helped with volleyball camps, too,” said Starkweather.

Starkweather said that there were only two sports that did not suffer heavy losses in the aftermath of the tornado.

“With the exception of football and track, all other sports lost all of their uniforms, equipment and supplies,” said Starkweather.

Starkweather is positive about the future of JHS athletics.

“We’re going to have a state of the art high school as well as fantastic new facilities for our athletic teams,” he said. “We are looking forward to the future because we are going to get through these next few years. And there is something nice for us down the road.”

Joplin Schools in the news

Joplin Schools has been in many national news stories featuring both the destruction and successes in preparing for the first day of school. (Right) Superintendent Dr. C. J. Huff trades hats for the day with a CNN film crew. (Below) Joplin Schools employees hold up copies of the August 15, 2011 issue of USA Today featuring Joplin Schools on the cover.

Photos by Danny Craven
WE ARE JOPLIN

JEFFERSON – KELSEY NORMAN – MCKINLEY – ROYAL HEIGHTS – STAPLETON – WEST CENTRAL

WE ARE EAGLES

EAST MIDDLE – NORTH MIDDLE – SOUTH MIDDLE – JOPLIN HIGH – FRANKLIN TECH – MEMORIAL

WE ARE STRONG

WE ARE RESILIENT – RISING FROM THE RUBBLE OF MAY 22, 2011 – STRONGER THAN EVER