

## Opinion: Thanks For Helping Century In Tornado Recovery Efforts

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*by Debbie Nickles, former Century Town Planner*

As 2018 begins, it is time to reflect back on the past two years as the Town of Century's disaster recovery is on its way to completion. As a result of the February 15, 2016, EF-3 tornado that whipped through parts of the town, it is time to thank all the players who have contributed to the recovery process.

Immediately after the event, the American Red Cross was in Century serving food and water to several neighborhoods. In addition, Escambia County Sheriff's Department officers were on the job making sure everyone was safe and secure. Several church groups traveled to Century and contributed to the clean-up of neighborhoods and streets. I remember a group from Hillcrest Baptist Church clearing streets of trees and other vegetative debris as well as removing fallen trees from many rooftops.

The Escambia County Public Safety Division and the Building Inspections and Permitting Department were present to assess the damages to the housing stock and planning recovery efforts in concert with the town. The county's neighborhood Enterprise Division was there to determine the need for housing rehabilitation and reconstruction. Representatives from the Escambia County Perdido Landfill were there to help the town deal with the tons of trees and other vegetative debris by providing equipment and manpower.

Once damage assessments were complete, several agencies were there to start the recovery process. The town is most grateful for services provided through United Way of Escambia County, Be Ready Alliance Coordinating for Emergencies (BRACE), Legal Services of North Florida, Inc., United Methodist Ministries, St. Vincent de Paul and Catholic Social Services.

Without the services provided through these agencies, many of the tornado victims in Century would not have been able to recover.

The Neighborhood Enterprise Division, applied for and received funding through the State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program, as administered by the Florida Housing Finance Corporation. SHIP funds were to be used to rehabilitate and/or reconstruct housing units damaged and/or destroyed by the tornado. To date, the County's Neighborhood Enterprise Division has expended approximately \$2 million in housing assistance in the Century area.

Recovery would not have been a reality without the County's participation since a large majority of the homeowners did not have private insurance. Pensacola Habitat for Humanity partnered with Escambia County and the Escambia County Housing Finance Authority in order to construct the new homes. For several months after the disaster, the Escambia County Building Inspections and Permitting Office had staff members working at town hall to issue building permits.

The Town of Century could not have recovered without the aid and assistance from these partnerships! I am sure I may have forgotten someone—please know this was not intentional. A big thank you to all who answered the call as Century is now on its way to full recovery!

NorthEscambia.com file photo.