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Greensburg, Kan.

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Demolition

Colorado Contractor Helps Rebuild Greensburg

Greensburg, Kan. – A year after a devastating tornado leveled Greensburg, Kan., on May 4, 2007, a Frederick, Colo.-based contractor has helped the first commercial reconstruction take root along the rural town's main street. More than 95 percent of the structures were rubble when Del Fast, CEO of Mishler Construction Co. (www.mishlerconstruction.com), arrived on the scene with equipment to extend help within days of the F-5 storm. Fast's wife is from a small town west of Greensburg.



From left, Del Fast of Mishler Construction, Frederick, Colo.; Ken Davidson of Side-by-Side and Rogers Strickland of Strickland Construction, both of Olathe, Kan., in front of the new store recently completed in Greensburg, Kan.

“Four of us, including Howard Kelley and Stu Featherston, from my church in Niwot, and Gary Jantz, a friend from Greeley who grew up in Greensburg, headed out to survey the area,” Fast said. “I had done similar volunteer work with Mennonite groups. We have since collaborated with another Butler metal building contractor based in Olathe, Kan., that I’ve come to know through our mutual interest in church construction. They led the donated project for the reconstruction of a non-profit store operated by the Greensburg Ministerial Alliance.”

The group of churches had operated the Care & Share Thrift Shop & Food Pantry for 25 years to benefit people in

need in the county. The old store was leveled by the 200-mph winds and became a candidate for replacement because the contractors preferred its non-profit nature and community-wide mission. The replacement store was essentially completed in February 2008 after multiple trips – many times during bitter winter conditions – by volunteer teams, including a group of personnel from Mishler Construction. Their collective efforts were coordinated over the winter by Side-by-Side International, a non-denominational service organization based in Olathe, Kan., that has constructed donated buildings in impoverished villages in Central America, Jamaica, Brazil, tsunami-ravaged Sri Lanka, and hurricane-shattered areas of Mississippi.

The project team worked with a LEED®-certified design consultant, subcontractors, youth and church groups, and individual donors and suppliers to create the replacement store. It embodies “green” design features promoted for the town’s reconstruction and is the subject of a 13-part television series that will air on Planet Earth, a new television venture by The Discovery Channel. The movie actor and environmental activist, Leonardo DiCaprio, has helped promote the town’s rebirth as a model eco-friendly community.



The completed Care & Share Thrift Shop & Food Pantry building in Greensburg.

“It was obvious that the town needed a sign of commercial reconstruction to get under way as soon as possible, which made the Butler pre-engineered metal building the logical construction choice for the project,” reflected Fast, who builds projects applying metal

buildings throughout his trade area of Colorado. “Rebuilding it as a volunteer initiative also made a statement about what can be accomplished even without the drawn-out process of waiting for federal disaster recovery funds.”



The devastation caused by the tornado as it passed through Greensburg.

Since committing to the project in July 2007, the initiative raised the equivalent of more than \$350,000 in private donations for the 5,000-square-foot project that has involved 20 contributing partners. Design was underway by August and construction proceeded over the winter despite the challenging conditions. Hernly Associates, of Lawrence, Kan., served as project architects, and PKMR Engineers, Overland Park, Kan., served as the mechanical and electrical engineers.

Working within a limited budget and reliant on donated resources, the project adapted a metal building system supplied by Butler Manufacturing Co. to include sustainable features such as a foundation insulated with 3 inches of foamboard, a standing seam metal roof system insulated to an R-38 rating, and R-16 factory-insulated metal wall panels for the sides and rear wall. The storefront has a vintage character common to many rural town streetscapes, except it applies double-pane, low-E glazing. In addition to the substantial building envelope, the store has insulated skylights, an energy-efficient HVAC system and a 3,700-cfm ventilation system for transitional season cooling as other energy-efficient features. Comparable benefits will derive from the high-efficiency lighting; its 60 fixtures can selectively deliver 75 foot-candles in two zones.

“It means a lot to us to have the Thrift Shop operating, again,” said

Pastor Marvin George, president of the Greensburg Ministerial Alliance. “For years, food drives and up to \$15,000 a year in proceeds from the store have benefited the needy throughout Kiowa County. That is why so many things about this new building are symbolic of how this community is coming back together”

Much still remains to be done, however.

To fully appreciate the impact of the storm, consider that the town’s footprint was approximately 2 miles wide. The funnel was 1.7 miles wide when it howled through Greensburg and claimed 11 lives along its path through the town. Aerial news photos reminded many of Hiroshima after the atom bomb. The havoc unleashed that night on Greensburg made national news about a community that had only 1,400 residents. It was most noted before the storm as the site of the biggest hand-dug well and for a half-ton meteorite that had been retrieved years ago from an Ellis Peck farm field east of town.