



# REBUILDING JOPLIN

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TORNADO: AP PHOTO/TORNADOVIDEONET

**PITCHING IN TO HELP**  
Following the most destructive tornado in U.S. history, Diamond International provided manpower, money and supplies to aid devastated employees like David Noe (top, center) and help rebuild a community.

AFTER **JOPLIN, MO.** WAS DEVASTATED BY A HIGH GEAR TO HELP THE COMPANY'S EMPLOYEES AND THE

TORNADO, **DIAMOND INTERNATIONAL** SHIFTED INTO COMMUNITY RISE FROM THE RUBBLE.



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The first things you notice are the trees. When a merciless tornado leveled the small city of Joplin, Mo. on May 22, 2011, hundreds of once-proud oaks, evergreens and sycamores were shredded of their bark by winds that reached more than 200 mph. One year later, the jagged remains of those trees—some still scarred by slabs of steel tossed around like matchsticks by the storm—serve as powerful reminders of how Mother Nature can trample a community and the lives of its residents in the blink of an eye.

The multivortex tornado cut a six-mile path of destruction through the heart of the city, picking up momentum as

**SHIFTING INTO HIGH GEAR**  
Donations generated by Diamond International under the direction of President and CEO Dick Sweebe (below, right) were distributed from the Joplin dealership—miraculously untouched by the tornado—to employees and Joplin residents.

it barreled eastward from the Kansas border, touching down several times along the way on major commercial and residential thoroughfares and leaving devastation wherever it passed.

Disaster officials and insurance companies estimate the total damage at more than \$3 billion—the costliest tornado in history. More than 7,800 buildings in the city were battered. Windows were shattered and ceilings caved in at St. John's Regional Medical Center, a hospital with roots dating back to the 1890s. Its patients were forced to evacuate and were later placed in makeshift triage tents outside the building. Joplin High School, whose graduation ceremony occurred earlier that day, was flattened. Power was out for nearly a week, and for some residents it took more than a month for TV and Internet service to return.

All told, 161 people in the area died in the disaster—the largest death toll registered by a U.S. tornado since 1953. And while rebuilding efforts are visible everywhere, with roughly a third of the homes leveled, it will probably take years for Joplin to fully recover.

## Hitting Close to Home

That spring Sunday had started off as a bright and sunny day, and on the southeastern end of town, 114 sparkling new ProStar®+ rigs were parked at Diamond International Trucks, ready to be delivered to a major customer. A bustling truck sales, lease and service center with 30 employees, the facility moved to its current location at 2800 S. David Blvd. five years ago and has grown into a major player in the regional truck market and a fixture in the city.

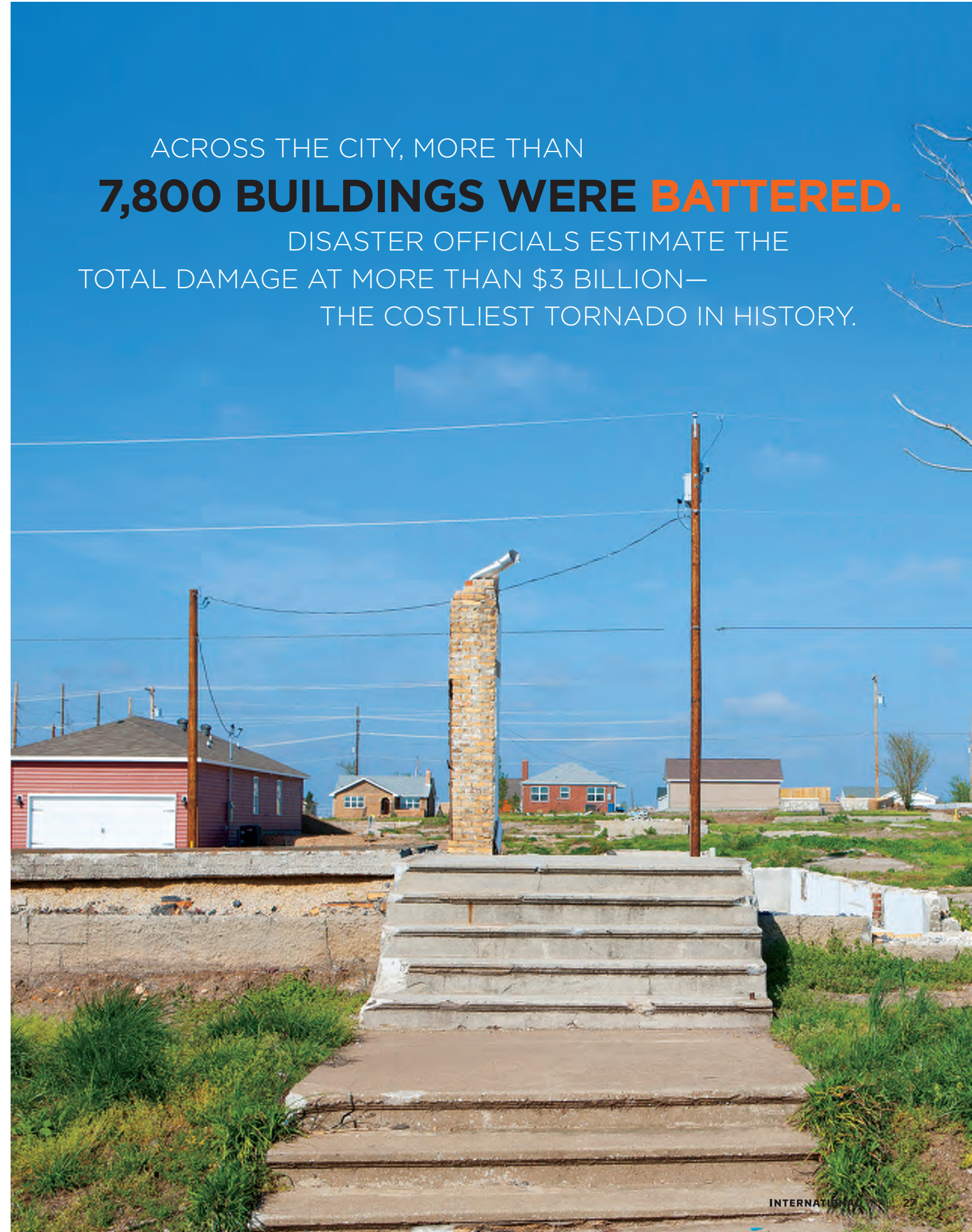
The tornado barreled into Joplin at 5:41 p.m., but when it reached the

International dealership approximately 19 minutes later, it crested a nearby hill and miraculously skipped like a stone over the sprawling seven-acre facility, coming down a scant 200 yards from the lot. Amazingly, not a single truck suffered even a scratch in the twister. The only evidence that the marauding storm had come so close was a damaged service bay door, marked No. 13, which was sucked inside by the wind's colossal air pressure.

"It clipped us. Had it shifted this way by just a couple hundred yards, it would have taken out all of that equipment. Trucks would have been everywhere," says Diamond General Manager Steve Cook, standing on the front lot and pointing to the damage suffered by a warehouse across the road where sheet metal was peeled away by the storm. "We were very fortunate."

Parts Manager James Rider, 45, wasn't so lucky. Parked in his Chevy Silverado just a few blocks north of the tornado's ruinous path, he rode out the storm, which ravaged the city for 32 agonizing and destructive minutes. When the funnel cloud passed, he drove toward his home on East 25th Street, a few miles past the dealership, to check on his dogs. Soon, downed power lines made the roads impassable, so Rider took the last five blocks on foot, trying his best to navigate his way home despite the fact that every familiar visual cue was gone.

"My house was right here," he says as he stands in front of the ravaged yard. He points to the shredded remnants of a solitary oak tree on what used to be his manicured lawn. "I had eight of those [trees] that you couldn't put your arms around. One fell on the house." Rider's home was extensively damaged, but his dogs survived.



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**DIAMOND** WOULD BE THERE.”



Across town, 27-year-old David Noe, mobile maintenance technician for Diamond Idealease, was at home with his wife and two of his stepdaughters when he saw the sky turn an ominous color he had never seen before. The four of them rushed into the bathroom, held one another and prayed as what seemed like a freight train barreled through their front door. “When it hit, you could hear the windows blow out and the rafters snapping,” he remembers. Miraculously, when it was all over just a few minutes later, the bathroom was all that was left undamaged in the house. “I opened the door that normally led to our bedroom and could see what was left of our neighbor’s house,” he says, his youthful face becoming more serious. “The roof was completely gone.”

For Rider, Noe and the four other Diamond International workers who had lost nearly everything, there seemed to be no hope to hang on to. “All of your clothes are gone, except what you have on your back. You need a place to stay,” says Rider, when asked about the immediate post-storm scene in Joplin.

Little did they know that their boss was already making plans to bring them some relief.

### Driven to Action

Miles away in Memphis, Richard Sweebe, president and CEO of Diamond Companies, got word of the storm and knew instantly that he had to help. He quickly set up a charitable trust from

**ALL IN THE FAMILY**  
Diamond International employees receive and deliver clothing, food and other supplies to help their co-workers and neighbors (below); relief efforts have led to the construction of many new homes in the past year (below, right).

the company’s headquarters and agreed to match any contributions made by fellow staffers at Diamond’s other 15 locations across four states in the region. “I said, ‘We have to get them money right now,’” Sweebe recalls.

All told, more than \$60,000 in cash was delivered to the six storm victims, including \$6,000 raised by a silent auction quickly organized by Sweebe’s wife, Bobbi Jo. But the Diamond International extended family was just getting started.

Diamond’s dealerships in Kansas City, Little Rock and Memphis initiated collection drives in their respective communities, and within a few days of the tornado an International 9900i—usually serving as a parts delivery truck—arrived at the Joplin International location with a 48-foot trailer loaded with clothes, toiletries, water and canned goods. Two service bays were transformed into a sort of temporary convenience store for the Joplin employees, with boxes filled to the brim.

“It told me about the culture of the company,” Sweebe says. “There’s an esprit de corps. We’re spread out, but it felt like we were all [in it] together.”

Noe, for one, was grateful for the assistance: “That was a great relief, to learn we were going to get some help.”

In fact, Doug Carney, Joplin’s service manager, soon realized that the donations far exceeded the needs of the six employees, so the supplies were opened up to the many other Joplin residents devastated by the storm. After a few weeks, the remaining materials were turned over to the Salvation Army. “It was a good feeling that we were able to help not only our Diamond family but other families as well,” Carney says.

### Reaching Out Further

And that’s not the only way Diamond helped to pull Joplin from the rubble. Because power was out for four days and Internet service didn’t resume for close to a month, the dealership’s team of technicians helped fix more than 40 utility and debris-clearing trucks and assisted with the cleanup effort. “We had to call up other [Diamond] locations for parts numbers,” Carney says. “FEMA sent several trucks [to Joplin]. When one went down, it was important to get it back out there.”

Today the victims from Diamond say their lives are nearly back to normal. Some admit that the sound of tornado sirens puts them on edge; but there’s also security in knowing that their employer and co-workers will have their back. “That helps a lot,” Noe says. “I know that if I or anyone else here ever went through [anything like this] again, Diamond would be right there.”

Thanks to the financial contributions, all six of the Diamond employees have found new housing and replaced most of the items that were lost. Like the rest of Joplin’s residents, they know the hard part is behind them and are optimistically looking ahead toward a brighter future.

Rider—who spent months living with friends and family and, for a while, in a Prowler travel trailer—now smiles with pride as he stands on the front porch of his handsome new knotty pine ranch house on the outskirts of town, which was paid for in part by Diamond Companies. “Oh yeah, this feels like home,” he says. “It sure does.”



See and hear the stories of help and support for Joplin with the **Trail app for iPad®**.

