



Cellar of Yesteryear Saves Family of Seven

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Van Buren County, Arkansas

Van Buren County, AR – On Feb. 5, 2008, a tornado wreaked havoc on the town of Clinton, Arkansas, leaving area residents in utter dismay. Fearing its wrath, some of the residents sought safety in storm shelters. Danny Pistole, a barber by trade, his wife, Donna, and family members survived to tell their story by seeking shelter in a storm cellar built in 1925. Pistole’s daughter, Jennifer, who lives 30 miles away, had been listening to the radio when she heard the severe weather alert. She immediately called her father.



“By the time I spoke with her the cable went out,” Pistole said. “I immediately called my son, Jeff. He and his four children, Julia, Zackery, Shelby and Sam, rushed right over and we all headed for the cellar.”

Once inside Pistole realized there wasn’t any lighting. He kept kerosene lamps inside the cellar. In haste to seek safety, he had forgotten to secure a lighter or matches. He attempted to return to his home.

“I got out of the cellar to go back to the house which was just a few feet away,” Pistole recalls. “All of a sudden I saw nothing but blackness. I knew I couldn’t make it. So I ran back to the cellar.”

As soon as Pistole closed the door of the 10-foot by 12-foot concrete cellar he heard what sounded like a loud explosion. In a matter of seconds his double-wide mobile home was reduced to rubble. Parts from the structure and its contents hurdled over the cellar.

The storm cellar was built by his grandfather who was simply honoring Pistole’s great grandmother’s wishes. She was afraid of storms. Following their death, Pistole leased the property, which included a house and the cellar. Years later he noted that the home was in disrepair. Its occupants had also used the cellar as a shelter for pigs.

“I tore the house down, bought a double-wide mobile home, and moved on [to] the property about ten years ago,” Pistole said. “At a cost of approximately \$500 I purchased rebar and concrete to re-surface the floor in the cellar and put in a new drain line. I know the cellar is sturdy. It’s made of concrete and steel.”

Pistole plans to continue working on refurbishing the shelter. A quick view of it leaves the impression that the cellar has, indeed, weathered many storms. Riddled with cracks and its concrete a darkened hue, it proved once again that it exists to serve a purpose – to save lives.

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region VI**

State: **Arkansas**

County: **Van Buren County**

City/Community: **Clinton**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Private**
Hazard Type: **Tornado**
Activity/Project Type: **Safe Rooms/Community Shelters**
Structure Type: **Concrete, Reinforced**
Activity/Project Start Date: **06/1950**
Activity/Project End Date: **06/1950**
Funding Source: **Homeowner**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Unknown**
Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**
Tested By Federal Disaster #: **1744 , 02/07/2008**
Repetitive Loss Property? **No**

Reference URLs

No URLs were submitted

Main Points

- Concrete cellar built by owner's grandfather protects family from tornado.



This is a picture of a concrete and steel storm shelter built in 1925



Debris fro explosion of mobile home landed on top of the shelter