



FEMA

Cellar of Yesteryear Saves Family of Seven

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 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.



Van Buren County, Arkansas



Quick Facts

Sector:

Private

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Safe Rooms/Community Shelters

Primary Funding:

Homeowner