





Matching volunteers to people who needed help removing muck from basements and other recovery tasks. Photo by Jack Rowell.

The People *versus* Irene

Commemorating the power of community 10 years later

— By Stephen D'Agostino —

On August 28, 2011, an unwelcomed visitor came to Vermont. Tropical Storm Irene was forecast to bring high winds. Instead, it brought rain—lots of rain. Woodstock recorded a deluge of over seven inches, swelling rivers, which, in turn, damaged and destroyed homes and businesses. Irene also brought out the best in people who saw their friends, neighbors, and town suffer and were determined to do something about it.



Above: Flooding in Woodstock Village. Photo by Alison Clarkson.

Opposite: White Cottage Snack Bar leans precariously in the aftermath of Irene. Photo by Jack Rowell.



Above: Employees and friends of Woodstock Farmers' Market pitch in to clean up after the storm. Right: The market at the height of the deluge. Photos by Cindy Carroll, courtesy of Woodstock History Center.



With Woodstock Farmers' Market closed in anticipation of power outages, Patrick Crawl, the store's owner, was enjoying a peaceful Sunday at home. Late in the morning, a friend called to tell Patrick the dumpsters that were usually behind the store were afloat in the lot. He rushed to town and fought his way into the already flooded building. As the water was climbing up his legs, he grabbed the most important thing for the future of Woodstock Farmers' Market, the hard drive that held all the business's data. Retreating to higher ground, he watched the water burst through the doors he had locked on his way out of the building.

Next door, Phil Camp, owner of *The Vermont Standard*, was in the paper's

office undertaking an effort to save things as futile as Patrick's had been. His wife, who was standing at the back of the building watching the river, screamed to him, "We've got to get out of here! You can't keep trying to salvage things."

SHOVELS, DUMPSTERS, VATS, AND BUCKETS

By the next day, a sunny Monday, the rivers had receded. Power was out regionwide, and the town aqueduct and the sewer system had suffered catastrophic damage, knocking out water to the village and much of the town. Further, like many of the surrounding communities, Woodstock was isolated because the floodwaters had chewed

up the roads leading into town. But it was not all gloom.

At Woodstock Farmers' Market, Patrick was greeted by a sight perhaps even more extraordinary than what he had witnessed the day before: people armed with shovels arriving to help him dig out.

Jed Dickinson, owner of Woodstock Recycling and Refuse, offered free use of his dumpsters. Perhaps in a state of shock, Patrick said they were fine. They wouldn't need any dumpsters. Stacy, Patrick's wife, recalls that she was standing behind Patrick as he was declining Jed's offer and pantomimed to Jed to bring the dumpsters.

Ned Macksoud, who supplied maple syrup to Woodstock Farmers'



Top: Many homeowners faced the daunting task of removing mud from their basements. Photo by Jack Rowell.

Above: Neighbors with water helped those without. Photo by Ann Marie Bohn, courtesy of Woodstock History Center.

Left: The covered bridge in neighboring Quechee was damaged beyond repair. Photo by Jack Rowell.



Above: The damage to *The Vermont Standard* office shows the power of the rushing water from the Ottauquechee River. Photo by Ann Marie Bohn.

Right: Route 4 was severely damaged by the floodwaters. Photo by Cindy Carroll. Both photos courtesy of Woodstock History Center.



Market, came by with his tractor. He maneuvered the machine through the doorway and scooped up an odd mix of mud, mushrooms, and meat, silt, snacks, and squashes. Everything that had been below the high-water mark had become ingredients of this strange stew. Ned delivered each load he had backed out of the store to one of Jed's dumpsters. When full, Jed removed the dumpster and replaced it with an empty receptacle.

That Monday, Phil Camp returned to the *Standard's* office, its front pushed out from the rushing water as it exited the confines of the building. He was determined to salvage what he could. Not long after he arrived, Phil recalls, "a beat-up car pulled up, and four cadets, all the way from West Point, climbed out and asked, 'What can we

do to help?'" Other volunteers joined them, primarily women from town. They went into the damaged building and "dug through the mud to salvage computers and what else they could."

SERVING THE HUMAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Townwide recovery efforts also took shape that Monday. Town Manager Phil Swanson and the town's leaders focused on repairing the infrastructure. When then-state representative Alison Clarkson asked about the human infrastructure, Phil Swanson recruited her to help. "He gave us a full green light to organize a volunteer response on food, clothing, shelter, and water," Alison says.

Sally Miller, executive director of Sustainable Woodstock, and Alison met at the elementary school, the town's

emergency shelter. In no time, people arrived with shovels asking how they could help. Volunteers joined the relief efforts and matched members of the shovel brigade with homeowners who had basements full of muck.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) delivered bottled water so that people could drink and possibly cook. Without running water, though, there was no means to shower or, as a surprise to some, flush toilets.

Fortunately, there was a human-powered solution to that. As a longtime member of the South Woodstock Fire Department, Chip Kendall knew how to respond to emergencies. And as a sugarer, he had just the tool to help. Chip filled a vat intended to collect sap with water from his generator-powered well and drove it to the school. "The



Top: The receded flood waters expose a truck buried in silt carried by the river. Photo by Jack Rowell.

Above: Community picnic on the Green days after the storm. Photo by Jack Rowell.

Left: Advertising help for those in the Woodstock area whose homes were without water. Photo by Ann Marie Bohn, courtesy of Woodstock History Center.



Erik and Laurel Tobiason take a break from repair work at the Riverside Mobile Home Park. Photo by Alison Clarkson.

water wasn't potable," Chip notes, given how it was delivered, "but people could use it to flush their toilets."

Erik Tobiason, co-owner of Colby & Tobiason, a construction company, and Erik's wife Laurel also became short-term water haulers, delivering buckets of water to the Homestead House and Mertens House, care facilities in town. They then focused their attention on the Riverside Mobile Home Park, which, as its name might imply, was hit hard by the flood. Homes in which the water reached the living space were beyond repair and needed to be demolished. For those with less damage, Erik and Laurel did what they could, including replacing water-logged insulation below the structures.

Lauren Wilder spearheaded a no less memorable act of kindness. Employing skills she had honed feeding large gath-

erings at weekly suppers called Hand in Hand at the Unitarian Universalist Church, she moved the meals to the Green and made community dinners twice in the week following the flood, using food donated by restaurants and

businesses that would have otherwise been discarded as it melted in their unpowered freezers. For those recovering from the trauma of the storm and those exhausted from helping out, a meal cooked for them and time spent

Tropical Storm Irene and the Community Response by the Numbers

7.34—Inches of rain from the storm, as recorded in Woodstock

1,915—FEMA applications from Windsor County, the highest number in the state

1,161—Number of people who volunteered in the two weeks following the storm (a number that would rise to 1,600)

5,256—Number of hours of volunteer labor in the two weeks following the storm

20—Number of residents offering shelter to nonfamily and friends

(Source: *The Vermont Standard* September 15, 2011, and August 30, 2012)



Porta Potties on the Green were available for people whose houses lost water. Photo by Ann Marie Bohn, courtesy of Woodstock History Center.

with their friends and fellow volunteers must have felt like a treat.

A RELIEF FUND TAKES SHAPE

With infrastructure needs being met, volunteers focused on helping return life to a semblance of normal. “A lot of people lost things,” says Sally Miller. “They didn’t lose their home but lost household items. One man lost a freezer full of venison, which was his food for the winter. People lost full propane tanks. People had cars damaged. They needed money to repair or replace these things.”

Sally, along with others, created the Woodstock Vermont Area Flood Relief fund. The group enlisted Meg Seely, longtime board member of Ottawa-Quechee Health Foundation, who was familiar with the process of providing grants to people in need.

“Within a week,” Sally recalls, “we had money going out for food, clothing, medicine, and temporary shelter. Then we funded things like restoration and repair to pre-Irene condition of residences.” For example, some grants were used to fix driveways destroyed by the flood, a repair that, oddly, was not covered by federal relief dollars. Some of the money from the relief fund, Sally notes, was used to secure the homes in the Riverside Mobile Home Park.

Alison and Sally note that there was

a lot of work and distribution of grants at the beginning of the relief effort, but they tailed off quickly. Repair work continued into 2012, but people could live in their homes as they restored them. Similarly, businesses were able to operate as they worked their way back to prestorm capacity.

AN EXCITING TIME

These are just a few of the undoubtedly countless acts of heroism and selflessness exhibited by people in Woodstock and the surrounding areas following Tropical Storm Irene. Admitting how odd it is to say, Phil Camp notes that “it was still the most exciting time. To see people come together. There is something about Vermont, Vermonters, and particularly the people we live with around here that they dropped everything and came to help.”

And for Phil, he had a way to pay back those people who helped him, not only to get the paper back on its feet but for the 31 years of support of the *Standard*. The paper’s staff regrouped at Lincoln Corners, fashioned desks out of planks placed across two-door file cabinets, and used whatever resources they had. On Friday, September 2, 2011, they published the weekly edition with the headline “We Shall Overcome.” By that day, it was already apparent that this was a people-powered self-fulfilling prophecy. ^W

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