

The Perfect Storm

Since the new year dawned, associates of Life Care Center of Centerville have dealt with a series of events that many would describe as “a perfect storm” – and not by any means solely weather-related. Yet, through it all, while personally impacted and challenged, they have remained steadfast in their commitment to their residents.

It is an amazing account of service to others over self-centeredness and woe-is-me-ism.

In early January, Vicki Cogdill, director of nursing, learned that her 28-year old son had fallen off of a roof while on the job and had to have extensive surgery to repair multiple broken bones. She immediately assumed the role of caretaker in her own home. On that same day, the assistant director of nursing, Chris Kimbro, suffered severe chest pain and is at home recovering from surgery. While this was happening to the clinical leadership, the facility lost several nurses and has had a difficult time replacing these key positions.

If that were not enough to deal with, a well-known law firm brought a seven-year-old case against the facility, and the trial began in January, requiring the presence of the DON in the courtroom at all times. Every day, plaintiffs’ lawyers attempted to convince the jurors that Life Care Center of Centerville was a disgrace to the community and that it treated its residents like animals. Multiple former and current associates took the stand and spoke on behalf of the facility to refute those allegations. The climate of the trial changed daily. One day it was gloomy, and the next bright and sunny in regard to the potential outcome.

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While the battle continued in the courthouse, nature launched its own attack. On Feb. 5, a half-mile-wide tornado ripped through the county. Three associates and the facility beautician had either major damage or lost their homes.

Lois Licciardello, LPN, was at home with her young children when the storm hit. Their home was moved off its foundation an inch, but they were okay. Her oldest son was on his way home from college and became entrapped in his truck by a tree. Her oldest daughter, who lived on her property in a mobile home, also had damage to her home.

Lois received help from the Red Cross and many other organizations and was back to work quickly focusing on her residents. All she can say today is, "I am one of the lucky ones; any money you raise, please give it to the others."

Sandy Bagwell, LPN, received damage to the roof of her home, but made it back to work promptly. She helps maintain the care of the center's residents nightly.

Lauren Gentry, CNA, is assigned to the dementia unit. She had major damage to her home, which is still being repaired. She returned to work with a smile to share with her residents and fellow associates. Her home was in the center of ground zero, but is still standing, and the power has been restored. "I drive by her home daily on my way to the facility and am so thankful that we have her. And I am happy to say I still see her dog on their front porch, waiting for her to return everyday," said Latessa Morris, executive director.

Although not an associate of Life Care, Rachel Reynolds had just completed her first day as the center's new beautician. She was at home with her children and made it

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out within three minutes of the tornado consuming everything she had. “My aunt and I had our bodies over my kids protecting them, and we could see each other screaming but couldn’t hear it because the storm was so loud.”

She had no insurance as she had just recently moved in, and the storm pushed the home into her Jeep, damaging it as well. Rachel has since received help from the Red Cross and multiple individuals from the community.

“When I talked to Rachel for the first time after the storm, she said, ‘Tessa, Tuesday was the best day. Every time I would cut a resident’s hair, they just thought I was the best thing, and when I took them back to their section of the facility, the nurses told me how wonderful their hair looked and what a great job I had done.’ Despite the fact that this young, single mother had lost everything and had a near-death experience, the first thing that came to her mind was our residents,” Morris related.

On Feb. 11, Cogdill and Morris attended the trial for closing arguments. “Our adrenaline had kept us going into the late hours of the night,” Morris said. “The opposing lawyers asked the jury ‘punish this nursing home, and send a message to Life Care Centers of America that you will not stand for your neighbor to be treated like a dog.’

“With heavy hearts, we stood as the jurors entered the room one by one, holding the fate of our reputation in the community. As they read the verdict, a weight was lifted off of our shoulders. They answered in our favor. That night, after the verdict, Vicki and I discussed our ‘recovery plan of action’ and preparations for state survey,” Morris said.

“My drive into the facility for over a week was a sight of destroyed homes, uprooted trees that were as wide as a car, and what seemed to be a desolate land. But the

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morning following the verdict, the drive seemed completely different. I was seeing things differently. I said to myself, 'Hmmm, it looks much better. The houses are being rebuilt, the trash is out of the remaining trees, the cows look like they are eating better, and, oh yeah, that tree didn't need to be there anyway. A land that looked like a bomb had been dropped was looking more like a land that a community wasn't going to see die.'

It was then Morris recalled "a special story that we all know about. You know the one where the Lord says that He promises never to flood the earth again; the one where a rainbow appears as a sign that everything will be okay. This 'perfect storm' has indeed been perfect – because God had it planned all along. So if you think you are at your lowest, remember that there is *always* someone looking out for you."

--Beecher Hunter