



Renewal FROM THE Rubble:

THROUGH GOD'S GRACE,
UNION REBOUNDS FROM TRAGIC TORNADO.

BY TIM ELLSWORTH

As the summer weeks drifted away and the start of the fall 2008 semester drew near, one scene was common on the Union campus – especially at the site of the new student housing complex.

Head shaking.

Head shaking, as in, “How in the world did all these buildings get done this quickly?” Head shaking, as in, “Why has God been so good to us?”

In the dawn of Feb. 6, few at Union could have predicted the course the university would take over the next seven months. Hours before a tornado had smashed much of the campus, causing \$40 million in damage and leveling 70 percent of Union’s student housing. The Hurt and Watters complexes bore the brunt of the storm. None of the buildings in those two complexes was salvageable, and both complexes were demolished the week of Feb. 11.

Many wondered how Union could possibly recover. To stand on the campus on Feb. 6, that was not an unreasonable question to ask. But as the writer of 2 Chronicles expressed, it seems that the eyes of the Lord were running to and fro throughout the earth, to give strong support to those whose hearts are loyal to him. And in the weeks and months to come, God certainly demonstrated his power on the campus at Union.

On Feb. 22, Union broke ground on the new student housing complex. Original plans called for half of the 14 buildings to be ready by the start of the fall semester, with the other half to be completed by the spring semester in 2009.



One of the many new kitchens in the 16 new residence life facilities. Included in each apartment in the kitchen area is a washer and dryer.

Each of the new first floor residence life apartments includes a safe room.



But the two contractors working on the project – Worsham Brothers Construction Co. of Corinth, Miss., and Brasfield Construction Co. of Jackson – managed to finish the task earlier than expected. When freshman arrived for the fall semester on Sept. 4, they were greeted by 14 completed student housing buildings, ready for occupancy.

“Our 10-year plan for replacing our student housing became a six-month plan,” Union President David S. Dockery said. “Construction proceeded ahead of schedule, and we are grateful to God for providing for us in this way. It is truly overwhelming to think about where we were on Feb. 6, and where we are now.”

Even the contractors working on the project couldn’t believe how quickly it was completed.

“This is highly unusual to complete a project of this magnitude as quickly as we have,” said Ken Brasfield, president of Brasfield Construction. “As I sit back and analyze what’s happened, I think Union’s need is what motivated the response.

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One of the many new private bedrooms in the 16 new residence life facilities



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Everybody has had a total commitment and a passion to make sure that the job was completed by Sept. 1.”

The 14 new student housing buildings consist of about 158,000 square feet and house 699 students. The complex consists of four “quads” (named Watters, Hurt, Ayers and Grace) with four buildings in each quad. A 15th residential building is currently nearing completion that will finish the Ayers quad, and a 30,000-square-foot commons building that will complete the Grace quad is also under construction. It is expected to be complete during the fall 2009 semester.

The new student housing facilities are located in the former location of the Watters and Hurt complexes. The apartment-style suites in the new housing complex accommodate four students, each of whom has a private bedroom. Each suite also features two bathrooms, a kitchenette and a washer/dryer. Each building in the complex contains 40, 48 or 56 bedrooms.

Carl Grant speaks during the opening of the new \$3.5 million Carl Grant Events Center



All downstairs apartments contain a safe room to provide storm shelters for students. A memorial marker to the previous buildings is located on the sidewalk through the middle of the complex.

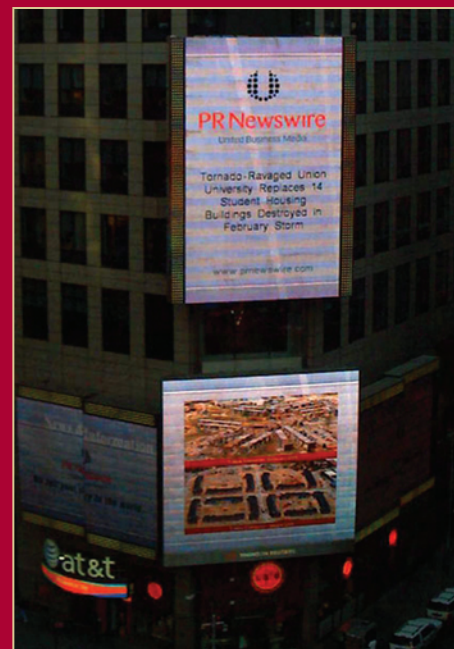
In addition to the 14 new buildings, the university rebuilt two buildings – Gray and Dodd – in the Heritage Residential Complex. MG Construction Co. was responsible for the reconstruction of those two buildings, which house 78 students. MG also handled the renovation of Jennings Hall, which sustained heavy damage from the tornado. Jennings also was ready to go for the fall 2008 semester.

The recovery didn’t stop there. On Oct. 21, Union dedicated the new Carl Grant Events Center, a \$3.5 million, 16,000-square-foot conference center and banquet facility. The new center seats 600 people and includes a lobby area, public restrooms, a staging room, state-of-the-art audio-visuals and a new president’s dining room. (See story on page 12)

The recovery could not have been possible without the people who served as “God’s agents and instruments of grace and mercy,” Dockery said. Five thousand volunteers came to campus to help in the days after the tornado, and 6,500 donors contributed nearly \$17 million to help rebuild the campus.

“For each and every one of these, we are thankful,” Dockery said. “For all that has happened on campus since Feb. 5, we can only say, ‘Thanks be to God.’”

The opening of the new residence life facilities makes the news on Time Square in New York City



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