

**1953**

**Beecher Tornado  
Commemoration  
Program**

**June 8, 2003  
Coates Auditorium  
Beecher High School**



# DEDICATION

This program is dedicated to all those who gave of their hearts to help neighbors and strangers during this time of devastation.



photo courtesy of The Flint Journal



# 1953 Beecher Tornado Anniversary

Wreath Laying Ceremony



June 8, 2003  
Beecher Tornado Monument  
12:00 noon

# PROGRAM

Welcome	John West American Red Cross
Colors Presentation	Genesee Co. Firefighter Association Color Guard
Invocation	Rev. Leonard Marks Faith Christian Church of Montrose
Opening Remarks	Honorable Rick Hammel Genesee Co. Board of Commissioners
Bag Piper	George Murray
Laying of the Wreath	Ron Sekelsky Tom Gensel Jr.
Benediction	Rev. Leonard Marks
Closing Remarks	John West



In this year of 2003, we pause to remember that 50 years have past since the disastrous, "Beecher Tornado", of June 8th, 1953. We would hope that the passage of time has healed all those who have suffered injury, or property loss. A special remembrance is due the many souls who perished in this tragic event.

## MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

<u>NAME</u>	<u>AGE</u>
BAIRD, MRS. VIRGINIA R.	25
BALLENTINE, JAMES H.	54
BEAN, MRS. ROSE A.	24
BERDAN, SHARON K.	10
BLIGHT, WESLEY J.	58
BOLIN, ALECICEA C.	8
BOLIN, TERRY L.	4
BONNEVILLE, MRS. VERNA N.	67
BOONE, DANIEL R.	6 MO.
BOONE, JESSIE I.	2
BRINK, CARL L.	23
BROOKS, CARL T.	47
BURGESS, LINDA J.	5
CLIFFORD, DAVID A.	3
COONS, MRS. JEAN	24
COOPER, HARRY E.	67
CRAMER, CHERLYN E.	4
CRAMER, MRS. DOROTHY M.	25
CRAWFORD, DALE A.	6 MO.
DEESE, HENRY C.	23
DEFORREST, WILLIAM H.	73
DENEEN, MRS. MARJORIE	31
DIPZINSKI, JAMES P.	18
DUNNING, JEROME W.	62
ECKERT, WALTER	52
FENDER, PATRICIA	17
FRANCE, WILLIAM D.	6



CONTINUED

<u>NAME</u>	<u>AGE</u>
GATICA, CELIA	20
GATICA, JOHN R.	2
GATICA, MARYANNE	3
GATICA, SALLY A.	4
GAUTHIER, SHERLEY M.	12
GENSEL, JUDITH A.	6
GENSEL, KATHLEEN L.	4
GENSEL, KENNETH R.	5 MO.
GENSEL, THOMAS R.	2
GENSEL, MRS. VENESSA O.	26
GINTER, RAYFORD P.	14
GOODHAND, ANDREW A.	39
GOODHAND, FREDERICK W.	15
GOSS, WALTER J.	11
HAMLIN, LOVELL J.	48
HAMMOND, JOAN	19
HAMMOND, JOSEPH E.	10 MO.
HARGER, LORRAINE C.	10 MO.
HARGER, MRS. SHIRLEY J.	22
HARMON, CLYDE D.	62
HARVEY, MRS. JESSIE V.	49
HEDGER, MRS. ALICE	40
HEDGER, CHARLOTTE	3
HEDGER, KATHERINE A.	5
HERNANDEZ, CARMEN	9
HILL, MRS. KATHRYN I.	23
HIPKINS, MRS. JENNIE E.	69
HOLDORPH, MRS. ELSIE M.	35
HOLDORPH, PHYLLIS	7
HUTSON, MRS. FRANCES L.	30
HUTSON, MICHAEL R.	7
HUTSON, PATRICIA D.	8
JIMMENEZ, DIANA	7
JOHNSON, CAROL A.	11
KANE, MRS. NORA K.	60



CONTINUED

<u>NAME</u>	<u>AGE</u>
KANE, JOHN E.	29
KILGORE, ANDREA J.	18 MO.
KILGORE, DALE W.	11
KILGORE, DANNY E.	5
KILGORE, MRS. HELEN I.	31
KREH, DIANE C.	2
KROSKA, MRS. HELEN V.	40
MANYCH, MRS. FRANCES	44
MATHEWS, DONALD E.	36
MILES, ELLEN M.	11
MILES, ROY L. JR.	7
MILES, ROY L. SR.	40
MORSE, MRS. FLORNCE A.	59
MORSE, GEORGE	62
MORSE, VERN L.	25
NIGSWANDER, MRS. MYRTLE E.	65
OAKS, MRS. MYRTLE	59
PARR, BARBARA	12
PARR, ROBERT	10
PARR, ROBERT W.	34
PENDERGRASS, CAROL L.	5
PENDERGRASS, HARRY A.	29
PFEIFFER, CHERYL A.	4
PLATT, CHARLES J.	56
POWELL, MRS. LEONA	25
QUINN, CAROL	17
QUINN, DONNA	13
QUINN, JOSEPH L.	49
QUINN, MRS. LORETTA M.	44
RHODES, MRS. BERNICE	46
ROBINSON, BARBARA	4
ROBINSON, LORNE M.	39
ROSS, ANGUS	65
ROSS, THOMAS H.	60
SEKELSKY, PAUL	38



CONTINUED

<u>NAME</u>	<u>AGE</u>
SHREVE, DIANE M.	1
SOMMERS, WAYNE E.	28
STOOPS, GLEN E.	33
SUNDAY, CAROL A.	16
TUTTLE, BARBARA	20
TUTTLE, DIANE	2
TUTTLE, HERSCHEL C.	43
TUTTLE, MARJORIE	10
TUTTLE, MRS. MARTHA	42
VAUGHN, JEANNE W.	9
VAUGHN, MRS. MURIEL L.	29
VAUGHN, PATRICIA J.	8
WALTERS, RONALD J.	15
WILLEY, DUDLEY E.	80
WILLEY, MRS. MARY A.	69
WORGES, MRS. CLARA E.	57
YAZANKO, MRS. ALMA E.	25
YAZANKO, DOTTIE J.	5
YAZANKO, GARRY D.	2
LAPEER COUNTY	
IRISH, LOREN	37



“I ran an errand for my mother and then proceeded to drive to Pat Fender’s house, arriving there about 8:20 p.m. The sky had already darkened considerably by the time I arrived at Pat’s home. Only moments later, we went to the front window of the living room to see the wind and lightning and hear, of course, the noise. Seconds later the rear window of the living room blew in and scattered glass all over the carpet. We hit the floor face down, side-by-side with our arms wrapped tightly around each other as if in one final loving embrace. The next thing I knew, I regained consciousness about 100 feet from where the house had been. I never found Pat nor saw her again. I thank Pat for the few years we had together and cherish the happy memories I have of her. She will everlastingly be in my heart and on my mind and in my memory, always 17 years old.”  
Leonard Brush, Beecher High School class of 1952 (Pittsburgh, Pa.)

# Salvation Army News

The War Cry for July 18, 1953 (page 18)



## **SALVATION ARMY WINS HIGH PRAISE FOR RELIEF JOB IN FLINT DISASTER**

FLINT, Mich. - Just twenty minutes after the recent tornado struck this city. The Salvation Army was on the job helping to search for the dead and injured persons and serving food and drink to the homeless survivors. Officers and soldiers toiled in drenching rain throughout the night.

Major Russell Crowell, commanding officer of the Flint Citadel Corps, writes that the devastation wrought was indescribable.

The day after the twister hit, the Major visited the city hospital to comfort and pray with the injured and their relatives.

A large tent was erected near the demolished Beecher High School as a central supply depot. Five mobile canteens covered the entire stricken area serving coffee and doughnuts to rescue crews.

Between 70 and 80 workers labored four days and nights without let-up. In one day the canteen served 112 pounds of

## **SALVATION ARMY...**

wieners, 75 pounds of cold meat, 150 dozen doughnuts and 4,000 sandwiches, plus gum, bakery goods, soft drinks, coffee and many gallons of hot soup.

Salvationists worked all night to sort and prepare for distribution 15 tons of clothing received from Detroit. "Appeals were made on the radio for bed linens and blankets, and the response was tremendous," Major Crowell said.

Assisting in the relief effort were 25 trucks sent from the Flint Men's Social Center as well as station wagons from the sur-

rounding corps.

Capt. Lawrence Neehan of the Michigan State Police cited The Salvation Army for their "splendid" work during the tornado emergency.

"They have been on the job 24 hours a day in the disaster area," Capt. Neehan said. "Major Crowell and his workers have been particularly helpful to police and firemen and countless other volunteers."

The governor of Michigan, the mayor of Flint, and the civil defense administrators gave high praise of the Army's service.



photo courtesy of The Flint Journal



# Red Cross Tornado Relief



According to an article in the August 1953 edition of the *General Motors Folks*, “The roaring tornado which swept the Beecher area of Flint on the night of Monday, June 8, killing 115 and injuring more than 650 persons, had scarcely gone its destructive way before the Red Cross was in action.”



Food, clothing, shelter and medical care was immediately provided and Red Cross volunteers from around the country began flying into Flint to help with the disaster relief operation.

“Even before the extent of the disaster was realized, Red Cross had two food canteens set up at the stricken area and two temporary shelters for the homeless,” according to *General Motors Folks*.

The article states that, “once past the emergency phase, the Red Cross turned to rehabilitation. The tornado had demolished 307 houses and damaged 122 others. Caseworkers ...interviewed victims. They visited morgues and hospitals, inspected the disaster area, talked to victims and checked with Flint social agencies. Everywhere they determined immediate rehabilitation needs and, where needed provided prompt assistance ... Red Cross operations in Flint were typical. They represented ‘the helping hand’ of thousands of generous people.

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***“General Motors folks in the tornado area will always remember how the American Red Cross came to them in their hour of greatest need.”***

***-General Motors Folks,***  
monthly magazine August 1953

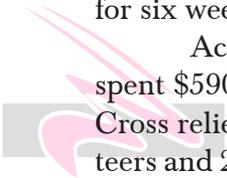


## **AMERICAN RED CROSS GENESEE-LAPEER CHAPTER...**

An article in *The Flint Journal* from December 8, 1953 describes the helping hand that residents received from the Red Cross. According to the article, "The American Red Cross donated assistance on the basis of need following a general national formula which varied according to the case. The case differences are myriad and (at this time) involve such things as the physical state of members of the family, whether someone is capable of supporting the family, and assets of the stricken family, such as insurance, savings or grants from other sources."

One of the cases listed in *The Flint Journal* describes the financial assistance received by the Jensen family.

"Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Jensen, 1099 W. Coldwater Rd., and two unmarried children: Their net loss was \$6,236 after subtracting \$9,000 worth of insurance... Food and clothing from the Red Cross totaled \$187 and the organization gave them \$1,246 for their house. In addition, the Red Cross paid a medical bill of \$161.50 for injuries received by Mrs. Jensen for which she was hospitalized for six weeks. Jensen is employed at Buick."



According to *The Flint Journal*, the American Red Cross spent \$590,533 in the Flint area after the deadly tornado but Red Cross relief did not stop after 1953. Today, led by over 600 volunteers and 23 employees, the Genesee-Lapeer Chapter annually provides relief to local families affected by over 200 disasters, trains over 17,000 people in lifesaving skills and exchanges over 500 emergency messages for U.S. military service personnel and their families. The Chapter also assists over 1800 clients with an emergency medical or dental need.

The American Red Cross Genesee-Lapeer Chapter is continually at work in our community providing lifesaving programs and services. To find out more, call (810) 257-0748.

# Are You Ready for a Tornado?

## Here's what you can do to prepare for such an emergency

### Prepare a Home Tornado Plan

✓ Pick a place where family members could gather if a tornado is headed your way. It could be your basement or, if there is no basement, a center hallway, bathroom, or closet on the lowest floor. Keep this place uncluttered.

✓ If you are in a high-rise building, you may not have enough time to go to the lowest floor. Pick a place in a hallway in the center of the building.

### Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit containing

- ✓ First aid kit and essential medications.
- ✓ Canned food and can opener.
- ✓ At least three gallons of water per person.
- ✓ Protective clothing, bedding, or sleeping bags.
- ✓ Battery-powered radio, flashlight, and extra batteries.
- ✓ Special items for infant, elderly, or disabled family members.

✓ Written instructions on how to turn off electricity, gas, and water if authorities advise you to do so. (Remember, you'll need a professional to turn natural gas service back on.)

**Conduct periodic tornado drills so everyone remembers what to do when a tornado is approaching.**

### Stay tuned for storm warnings

Listen to your local radio and TV stations for updated storm information.

✓ Know what a tornado WATCH and WARNING means:

● A tornado WATCH means a tornado is possible in your area.

● A tornado WARNING means a tornado has been sighted and may be headed for your area. Go to safety immediately.

✓ Tornado WATCHES and WARNINGS are issued by county or parish.



## TORNADO ...

### When a tornado **WATCH** is issued --

- ✓ Listen to your local radio and TV stations for further updates.
- ✓ Be alert to changing weather conditions. Blowing debris or the sound of an approaching tornado may alert you. Many people say it sounds like a freight train.

### When a tornado **WARNING** is issued --

- ✓ If you are inside, go to the safe place you picked to protect yourself from glass and other flying objects. The tornado may be approaching your area.
- ✓ If you are outside, hurry to the basement of a nearby sturdy building or lie flat in a ditch or low-lying area.
- ✓ If you are in a car or mobile home, get out immediately and head for safety (as above).

### After the tornado passes --

- Watch out for fallen power lines and stay out of the damaged area.
- ✓ Listen to the radio for information and instructions.
  - ✓ Use a flashlight to inspect your home for damage.
  - ✓ Do not use candles at any time.

### What to do when thunderstorms approach:

- ✓ Move to a sturdy building.
- ✓ If too far from shelter, find a low spot away from trees, fences and poles, but not in a place subject to flooding. If you are boating or swimming, get to land and shelter immediately.
- ✓ If you feel your skin tingle or hair stand on end, lightning may be about to strike. Squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands on your knees with your head between them. Minimize contact with the ground.
- ✓ Telephone lines and metal pipes can conduct electricity. Unplug appliances not necessary for receiving weather information. Use telephones only in an emergency.



photo courtesy of The Flint Journal

# **PROGRAM**

## **JUNE 8, 2003 - 1:00**

**WELCOME**

**JOHN McMURRY**  
COMMERCIAL V

**NATIONAL ANTHEM**

**TINA FIELDER-C**

**INVOCATION**

**MAJOR BU**  
SALVATION ARM

**NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE**

**DR. JOSEPH SC**  
DIRECTOR STOR

**FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

**ED BUIKEMA,**  
DIRECTOR, REGION 5

**AMERICAN RED CROSS**

**RACHEL Z**  
COMMUNITY O

**BEECHER TORNADO SURVIVORS**

**YVONNE (J)**  
LEONARD

**READING OF THE NAMES OF THE DECEASED**

**COMMEMORATI**

**BENEDICTION**

**MONSIGNO**  
PASTER ST. PIU

**CLOSING REMARKS**

**JOHN McMURRY**

# **PROGRAM**

**8, 2003 - 1:00 PM**

**JOHN McMURRAY**  
COMMERCIAL WEATHER SERVICES

**TINA FIELDER-GIBSON**

**MAJOR BUKIEWICZ**  
SALVATION ARMY COUNTY COMMANDER

**DR. JOSEPH SCHAEFER**  
DIRECTOR STORM PREDICTION CENTER

**F AGENCY**  
**ED BUIKEMA,**  
DIRECTOR, REGION 5

**RACHEL ZAGAROLI**  
COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EDUCATION

**YVONNE (JACABSON) HERRON**  
**LEONARD BRUSH**

**DECEASED**  
**COMMEMORATION COMMITTEE**

**MONSIGNOR RICHARD J. GROSHEK**  
PASTER ST. PIUS X

**JOHN McMURRAY**

# NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

The roots of the National Weather Service in Southeast Lower Michigan can be traced back to 1870 at Detroit. Under orders of President Ulysses Grant, the U.S. Signal Service was established, under the War Department, to take observations in Downtown Detroit. In October 1890, Congress passed the bill that created the Weather Bureau, which was then placed under the Department of Agriculture. Then in June 1940, the Weather Bureau was transferred to the Department of Commerce. This was followed in 1970 by the formation of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the changing of the name from Weather Bureau to National Weather Service. Through the 1970s and 80s, the NWS maintained local offices in Detroit, Flint, and Ann Arbor. But, by 1994, with the arrival of new technology, the three offices were collocated into a new facility in the northern Oakland County community of White Lake.

Today, the NWS White Lake Weather Forecast Office, are a world class team of 23 multi-disci-



plined professionals, utilizing cutting edge science and technology, whose primary mission is to issue accurate and timely warnings and forecasts for the protection of life and property. In addition, NWS provides quality meteorological and hydrological forecasts for the public, aviation, marine, and other agencies covering 17 counties in southeast Michigan.

The NWS has a long legacy of forecasting life-threatening weather events. The birth of tornado watches and warnings started with an accurate tornado forecast in March 1948 at Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma. The successful Air Force program eventually led to the Weather Bureau establishment of a severe weather unit in March

## NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICES...



1952. The “Severe Weather Bulletins” this unit issued were the forerunner of today’s watches.

The June 8, 1953 Weather Bureau forecast, as read in that afternoon’s Flint Journal, included thunderstorms that evening with hail and strong winds to over 50 mph. Later that afternoon, the Weather Bureau

issued a “Severe Weather Bulletin”, outlining eastern Lower Michigan and northern Ohio as the threat area for severe thunderstorms and tornadoes – an amazing forecast considering the infancy of the science. Today, this unit of forecasters is known as the NWS Storm Prediction Center and is located in Norman, Oklahoma.

The stage was set for storm-specific warnings in southeast Michigan with the introduction of radar technology in the 1950s. The first weather radar in southeast Michigan, a model WSR3, was commissioned at Detroit Metro Airport in 1957 – but was used mostly for aviation purposes. This was later replaced in 1961 with a more modern WSR57 model that could be better used for severe weather warnings. By 1994, the latest generation of weather radars, the WSR-88D NEXRAD Doppler Radar, was built at the NWS Weather Forecast Office in White Lake, MI and remains in use today.



photo courtesy of  
The Flint Journal



# GENESEE & LAPEER COUNTIES OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The Michigan Emergency Management Act of 1990 stipulates that each county shall appoint an emergency management coordinator to be responsible for disaster preparedness.

The Office of Emergency Management carries out a wide variety of tasks; however the overall mission of the department can be summarized in four categories: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

The purpose of mitigation is to prevent disasters from happening, or if the disaster cannot be prevented, to minimize its effects on the community. **Mitigation** comes in many forms, from public education to flood plain management.

The second phase of emergency management is **preparedness**. We know that not all disasters can be prevented, so the community must be prepared to respond and recover from disasters when they occur. In order to prepare, the director of EM identifies public and private resources throughout the community that can be drawn upon in the event of disaster. Organiza-

tions are matched with tasks that would need to be performed. Policy is developed in the form of an Emergency Operations Plan (also known as Emergency Action Guidelines).

In simple terms, the Emergency Operations Plan or Emergency Action Guidelines describe who is responsible for doing what during a disaster. Other emergency plans and procedures are developed to support these Plans. A resource manual is also prepared which lists people, equipment supplies and services that may be needed in a disaster situation. County, city township, state and federal resources are listed, along with available private resources. Site-specific emergency plans are developed for industrial locations and facilities. The Office of Emergency management also assists businesses and other facilities in the county with the development of their own emergency plans. Also, training of emergency response personnel is a big part of the preparedness.

**Response** is taking proper action when a disaster

## **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT...**

occurs. This may include such things as public warnings, search and rescue, fire fighting, emergency medical care, evacuation and sheltering, and damage assessment.

The response required is determined by the event. Whether the disaster is a flood, tornado, chemical release, airplane crash, or some other type of incident, the Emergency Operations Center is activated. The Emergency Operations Center is where local officials gather to coordinate disaster response and recovery efforts. The director of Emergency Management is responsible for maintaining the readiness of this facility. Training exercises are regularly conducted to test the Emergency Operations Plan and Emergency Operations Center.

Dedicated people, many of who are volunteers, carry out disaster response in the community. The director of EM works to coordinate their activities in an attempt to ensure the most effective response for the community.

**Recovery** is the process of bringing the communities back to as good as or better than it was before a disaster occurred.

This includes detailed damage assessment to determine community needs. Recovery may include coordinating assistance from the State of Michigan and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Communicating information to the public is one of the most important tasks for the Office of Emergency Management before, during and after a disaster.

This includes providing public education programs and free printed material about disasters, as well as the development of warning and emergency information systems. County and city public information officers work with local television, radio, and newspaper organizations to assist in this effort. The disaster communications system also includes a network of ham radio operators.

For more information about disasters, and Office of Emergency Management, in Lapeer County call 810-667-0242 or in Genesee County call 810-257-3064. You can also visit [www.mspemd.gov](http://www.mspemd.gov) or [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)





photo courtesy of Barbara Urbanik

### LIKE FREIGHTS (courtesy of The Flint Journal)

Robert Blue, 715 Washington St., Lapeer, and his wife, Alice, picked Monday night to visit his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hilton Blue, 1352 E. Coldwater Rd., and Robert's sister, Mrs. Janet Dell, who lives with her parents. He and his dad went out to the garage. They heard the roar and saw the tornado coming. They ran into the house and told everybody to get into the basement. "They started to get into that corner," Blue said, pointing. (It was easy to point anywhere in the basement-the rest of the house was gone.) "You can see it's just covered with stuff. But I told them to get over here. My dad got hit on the back with this big beam, but wasn't hurt seriously. That's the only thing that landed there. "The noise sounded like two freight trains going over a trestle right over your head; it was an ugly roar. My wife said the noise when the house went was like a giant pencil sharpener working." Then Blue went on looking for the watch that had just disappeared from his wife's wrist.





“I was a student at Beecher High School when the tornado struck. My friend Bill Grant and I were walking home when we saw the tornado coming. There was a ditch along side Alfred Street that had a tree that had been cut off about 4 feet high. I told him to get on one side and I would get on the other and we could lock arms. We laid there and watched the funnel go by. We saw three houses get picked up completely intact, they slowly rotated around and started to tilt when they were tilted about 45 degrees, they exploded into little pieces.”

Bill McNew: Palm Springs, Calif.



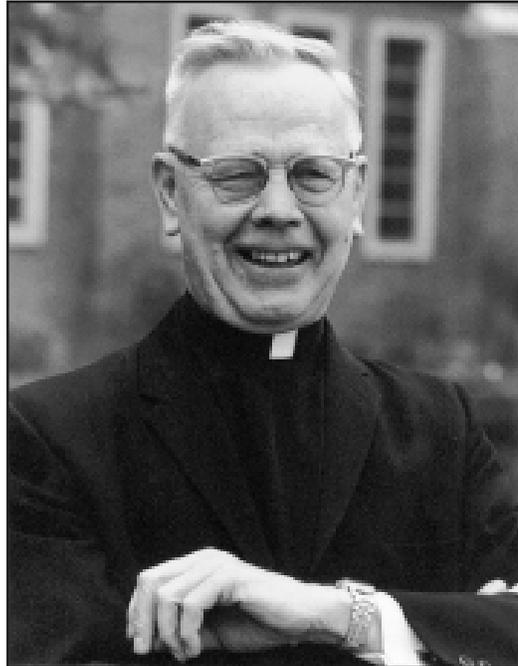
## FATHER BERKEMEIER

Born in Massillon, Ohio on November 28, 1911, Henry Berkemeier was the third of five children of Henry and Mary Berkemeier. The family moved to Jackson, Michigan in 1918.

While attending St. John High School, he informed his parents that he planned on joining the seminary after graduation. After graduating high school, he attended Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit and Mount St.

Joseph Seminary in Norwood, Ohio. He was ordained on June 3, 1939 by Bishop Joseph Albers in St. Mary Cathedral in Lansing.

At the time of the Flint Beecher tornado, he was stationed at St. Francis Parish, located in the Beecher district. To anyone who knew him, it was no surprise that he was credited with the idea and much of the success for the building bee that was christened "Operation Tornado." He approached Jack Niles, business manager and head of the painters union, as well as other local union leaders to see what could be done to help the homeless tornado victims. An organization meeting was called and union leaders, as well as Flint Mayor Donald Riegle were invited to attend. The response was overwhelming. On August 6, 1953, the mayor announced the names of a 14 member special committee that was to organize a two day home-building program to aid the tornado victims. "Operation Tornado" was born to take place the weekend of August 29 and 30. It took five thousand volunteers two days to rebuild the community.



Fr. Berkemeier was never afraid of hard work, having worked for the State of Michigan building roads while on summer breaks from the seminary. Because he wasn't afraid of work, he pitched in and helped with the rebuilding.

He was a quiet, generous soul. If ever there was a need, he was there to lend a hand. Not only was he there to rebuild houses, but he was there to help with people deal with their loss of family and property. It was always said that he had a good heart.

*Look* magazine and the National Municipal League honored Flint and its citizens by naming the city the "All-American City of 1953" for the project. Fr. Berkemeier accepted the Civitan International Award in the name of all the volunteers who helped bring relief to the tornado victims. In addition he was given the Valley Forge Freedom Award for his role in the effort.

It was especially difficult for him because of 22 of the 116 dead were from his parish. He always had a difficult time talking about this time in his life. He never took credit for Operation Tornado. Instead he always maintained that it was the people of Flint who deserved the accolades for what was done those two days.

Written by Jeannette Lienhart, Fr. Berkemeier's niece

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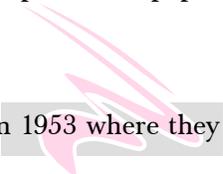
"It is like it was just yesterday. We could see a pretty cumulus cloud off to the west as we were driving north on Saginaw Street approaching Coldwater Road. We arrived home around 8 p.m. The winds started blowing very hard.

There were seven of us in the house. None of us had ever heard a tornado but we all knew immediately what that noise was. I yelled "get to the basement"

I called to Dad who had also come into the main part of the basement and stood on the other side of the doorway we had just come through. The scream of the tornado swas over our heads and the house was going. It was crumbling away from the force of the winds and the other debris. Then...suddenly, the entire house was gone. I looked up and saw paper flying through the air."

Richard McDermitt: Okemos, Mi.

The McDermitt's lived at 1100 E. Coldwater Road in 1953 where they owned and operated McDermitt's Bakery.





**‘TERRIBLE WALK’** (courtesy of The Flint Journal)

“I had to walk home from Dort Hwy., almost a mile, and I saw all those houses smashed on the way home. My husband and four children were in the house. The suspense was terrible; I never expected to find the house with all of them alive inside. The house was moved off the foundation and the refrigerator was in the basement of the house next door.” That’s how Mrs. Alfred Bennett, 1039 E. Coldwater Rd., found her family. She was luckier than many. No member of the family was injured seriously.





photo courtesy of The Flint Journal

“I don’t remember a lot about the children I cared for that summer, but I shall never forget five year old Davie. I won’t forget Davie. His Mom and sister were killed, another sister was brought to McLaren when he was and his Dad was in Hurley. His sister left the hospital before Davie regained consciousness. His major injuries were head trauma and a deep cut on one leg.

When Davie did regain consciousness, there began a battle to get him to stay in bed. That kid could get out of every restraint you could come up with so we settled for him sleeping in an easy chair in the hallway beside the nursing station. But don’t think you could get him to bed after he fell asleep in the chair! The slightest touch, and he would be awake. He also wanted all fans off, because the slightest breeze seemed to remind him of the storm.”

~ Virginia Stimer, McLaren Pediatric Nurse

### FREAKISH (courtesy of The Flint Journal)

Harvey Turfus, 1141 E. Coldwater Rd., “This is something nobody will ever forget who was in it,” Turfus said. “It’s a freak of a thing. Can’t figure out how it left my house standing and levelled others all around it.”

**Dwelling Gone, Still Find Joy** (courtesy of The Flint Journal)

A man and wife poked almost hopelessly through the shambles of their demolished home.

“We might as well put a match to it,” said Norman Smith, who lived at 1109 W. Kurtz Avenue before the tornado came.

“We could search for four days and not find \$10 worth left.” His wife, Beatrice, kept searching. Only scattered wreckage remained, but the Smiths didn’t consider their lot

entirely misfortune. For Mr. and Mrs. Smith and their four children, at home when the disaster struck, all survived. Six-year-old Michael is still hospitalized with a concussion, and Smith limps, while many near neighbors are dead.



photo courtesy of The Flint Journal



## FRIENDS OF THE COMMEMORATION CEREMONY

The members of the Beecher 50th Anniversary Tornado Commemoration Committee, expresses our sincere appreciation to the following persons, organizations, and businesses. Each of you have contributed to the success of this event. Forever we will treasure your kindness.

American Red Cross of Genesee & Lapeer

Armstrong, Kelvin, Beecher Schools Maintenance Supervisor

Bailey, Archie

Beecher Board of Education

Susan M. Hayes

David Grant Jr. (Treasurer)

O.T. Perry

Mary Rankins (President)

Jolena Sanders (Secretary) Jerry Skinner (V-President)

Robert Wilson Jr.

Beecher Fire Dept. (Chief Zappa, Officers and Firefighters)

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

Collinger, Sgt. Paul

Comcast

Community Foundation of Greater Flint

Cumulus Broadcasting

Dunning, Eugene W., In memory of his Grandfather

Eisinger, Duane , Tornado victim

Fielder-Gibson, Tina, Admin. Assistant to Sheriff Pickell

Flint Public Library

Genesee Co. Amateur Radio Emergency Services

Genesee Co. Association of Firefighters Honor Guard

Genesee Co. Board of Commissioners

Honorable Rick Hammel, Chairperson, District 8

Honorable Raynetta Speed, District 1

Honorable Floyd Clack, District 2

Honorable Ted Hammon, District 3

Honorable John Northrup, District 4

Honorable Miles Gadola, District 5

Honorable Fred Schaltz, District 6

Honorable Archie Bailey, District 7

Honorable Rose Bogardus, District 9



## FRIENDS OF THE COMMEMORATION CEREMONY

Genesee Co. Emergency Management Offices  
Genesee Co. Motorcycle Patrol  
Genesee Co. Radio Club  
Genesee Co. Senior Citizen Anti-Crime (SCAN) volunteers  
Heart of Senior Citizen Services - Mt. Morris  
Jackson, Dr. Kenneth, Superintendent Beecher Schools  
Kelly, Ken  
Lapeer County Emergency Management Office  
Lapeer County Amateur Radio Association  
Lienhart, Jeannette  
Mathews, Burt  
Miles Martin Funeral Home  
Mt. Morris Lioness Club  
Mt. Morris Township Police Department  
National Weather Services  
Neely, Creda, Tornado victim  
Reed, Gayle I  
Root, Les  
Sheriff Robert Pickell  
Sloan Museum  
Southeastern MI Chapter of the American Meteorological  
Society  
Stephens, Orville, Mt. Morris City Fire Department  
Sysco Food Services of Detroit  
The Flint Journal  
The Tornado Project of Environment Films  
The Salvation Army  
Towns, Joyce A.  
Tucker, Grace  
Williamson, Patsy Lou  
WFDF  
WJRT TV-12, Flint

A special Thank You to all the volunteers who helped to make  
this program memorable.





BEECHER 50TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION COMMITTEE

## 1953 BEECHER TORNADO

**RICHARD POLLMAN**  
National Weather Service

**GRACE RANGER**  
Emerg. Management Genesee Co.

**MARY STIKELEATHER**  
Emerg Management Lapeer Co.

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**Program Book designed by  
Gayle I Reed  
Heart of Senior Citizen Services  
Mt. Morris**