

# NEIGHBORS

## One family's helping hands

By Missy Pickel

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On any given day, down a long, bumpy dirt drive in northern Webster County, the Marlin family can be seen running the daily operations for their farm and tractor salvage business. Whether it's David working on a customer's equipment, the entire family in the hayfield, Robin or Ashley running errands or little Amber playing with kittens amongst the machinery, life is pretty much the same day-to-day.

But, while they may be known as businessmen and farmers, the Marlins are much more to those they help in times of need.

The afternoon of May 22, 2011, David was returning home from an auction in Oklahoma in his one-ton flatbed pickup loaded with a golf cart, when he brushed the edge of the EF5 tornado that hit Joplin.

"I was coming up 71 around about Neosho when some cousins called, telling me about the storms," said David. "Before I knew it, my truck was sliding around on the road."

David called his daughter, Ashley, who attends school at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College, to check on her well being and to make sure she was listening to the radio. The call ended quickly with cell phone service disrupted by the storm.

"I have never seen a wall cloud like that one," said David, describing it as spiraling horizontally, sucking up debris.

David stopped at the Flying J truck stop where as many as 39 semi-trucks and trailers were flung around the grounds. With no emergency personnel on the scene yet and fuel spewing all over the ground, David went in to



Contributed photo

As many as 39 semi-trucks and trailers were tossed around the Flying J truck stop when the May 22 tornado went through Joplin. Roy Turner, Ashland City, Tenn., assesses the damage before being taken to a hospital in Miami, Okla., for his injuries.

until a friend or family member could make it to their sides.

Meanwhile, Ashley, who was in Fairland, Okla., getting ready for a date night with her boyfriend, William Jackson, when her father called, turned on the radio and listened to the chaos coming across the airwaves out of Joplin.

"We watched the storm go through but we didn't even get any rain," said Ashley. "We jumped in the truck when Dad called to listen to the radio. Joplin's stations were asking any firefighters, EMT's, anyone with medical training and mentally strong enough to handle it to get there."

Right away Ashley, who had completed wildland firefighter training with the Bureau of Indian Affairs two months prior, and Jackson loaded any supplies they could find and headed to Joplin. With the main roads shut down, they took unfamiliar side roads. Their plans to get to her father were quickly sidetracked when the road they were taking led them to what was left of the hospital one hour after the tornado hit.

articulated loaders. David, his wife, Robin, and Ashley returned to help wherever they could. The majority of their work was lifting buildings and retrieving automobiles, equipment and supplies.

Robin says she met a lot of amazing people during their time at Joplin and have developed long-lasting relationships. While waiting at a refuge center to meet up with David in Joplin, she met Jackie Westervelt. Westervelt was bringing supplies and donations for victims but could not go into the hardest hit areas due to the restrictions. Robin was able to help since she was permitted to enter those zones and took in the much needed supplies.

Westervelt has since organized a group known as Twister Sisters.

According to its Facebook page, "The Twister Sisters is a sisterhood of love and support aiding women and girls during times of tragedy and loss. We collect and distribute items during times of catastrophe and personal loss such as hair brushes, combs, mirrors, lip gloss, nail polish, personal hygiene





the way it is." and language, I talked time, putting on her ng so loud when I - I d last week. Kate and ailing close behind us, ddenly didn't need my u want a treat?" Kate iend. "Guess what, ke you! She said she o have some candy!" er. eelance columnist. es@cox.net or write to s of The Rockwood Motherlode.com.

action, barricading fuel pumps and shutting off propane valves. After getting most of the fuel threat managed, David turned to helping the truck drivers. David helped four drivers from their trucks, three in need of medical attention. David attempted to take the men to the Joplin hospital only to be turned away due to the severity of damage. He then took side streets, as the interstate was shut down by that time, to the hospital in Miami, Okla. With limited seating in the cab, the injured men rode to Oklahoma on the bed of the truck in the golf cart. There he waited for more than 24 hours with the injured drivers from Tennessee and South Carolina

Military personnel directed them around live power lines to where they were needed. Ashley and Jackson spent several hours at the hospital moving medical equipment to where it was of the most use. Later in the night, the young couple would help with search and rescue efforts, clearing houses and searching for survivors. They were also recruited to clear out a nearby nursing home that incurred massive damage with very few survivors. "I walked in one person and walked out another," said Ashley. "What I saw, I would not put anyone else through." Monday, David returned home to get a few hours of sleep and two

items, jewelry — just things that make a lady feel good about herself after a disaster or life altering disruption." This was not the family's first experience with disaster. The Joplin storm is the third tornado in which they have helped with relief efforts. In 2003, after a tornado hit the Stockton and Pierce City area, the Marlins loaded up and helped with clean up. Ashley, who was 12 at that time, even helped, squeezing her small frame into rubble to retrieve precious mementos for families in grief. The Marlins also helped during the 2005 tornados that hit the eastern Marshfield area along E. Highway 38.