

Toyota Boosts Home Reconstruction in Joplin Since Devastating Tornado

October 23, 2012

JOPLIN, Mo., (Oct. 23, 2012) – Like most residents of Joplin, Tara Johnston's mind is frozen in time when she thinks back to that late Sunday afternoon on May 22, 2011 – the day a catastrophic tornado destroyed thousands of homes, including her house on S. Jackson Ave.

“Losing my home was one thing; the worst part was I thought I lost my daughter,” she said. “It was horrifying.”

While her daughter and the rest of her family survived the tornado, she was faced with the daunting task of rebuilding her home – made even tougher because she had no insurance. Johnston told her story from the front porch of that very home today at a press conference. The house, which is just weeks away from being completely rebuilt, is the result of many helping hands coming together to get one more displaced family back into their home.

As part of the celebration, a partnership between Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America (TEMA) and Rebuild Joplin, a local non-profit group whose mission it is to get storm survivors back into their homes, was outlined. Toyota has worked with the group the past six months in an effort to reduce the amount of time it takes to rebuild homes and get Joplin residents out of temporary housing. In addition, Toyota donated \$100,000 to Rebuild Joplin and its home-building efforts.

“Rebuild Joplin helps people like me who can't get loans; they help you either rebuild your home, or if damaged, help you fix it up at no cost or little cost to you,” said Johnston, a single mother and full-time student whose two children and grandchild live with her.

The partnership is working.

“This has allowed us to take donated dollars and donated time from volunteers and make it more efficient,” said Jerrod Hogan, co-founder, Rebuild Joplin.

Hogan said that by using lessons from the Toyota Production System (TPS), Rebuild Joplin has reduced construction time by three weeks on average. Bottom line, he said, “These improvements are making an incredible difference in our ability to rebuild homes for families in Joplin quickly and affordably.

“We are so excited to be partnering with Toyota. Now, one of our biggest challenges is securing enough volunteers so we can get people back in their homes. We not only need corporate support, we need the help of volunteers to get the job done. We still have more than 160 families in FEMA trailers and hundreds of families who don't have funds to rebuild their homes.”

Toyota, through its non-profit arm – the Toyota Production System Support Center (TSSC) – partnered with Rebuild Joplin in May with the intent to help the group make substantial improvements by increasing quality, productivity, safety and reducing customer wait time in the rebuilding of houses.

Rebuild Joplin is just one of 189 companies or not-for-profits that have been aided by Toyota.

“We’ve seen over and over again where our manufacturing techniques can help any kind of organization – whether it’s a manufacturer or a non-profit group,” said Steve St. Angelo, executive vice president, TEMA, and a managing officer for Toyota Motor Corp. “There is a lot of demand for this and we are sharing it free of charge.”

Since Toyota came on board, the time it takes for Rebuild Joplin to reconstruct a home has dropped from an average of 62 days to 41 days – a 34 percent improvement.

This time reduction can be credited to the following:

- Improved processes: the collaboration has consisted of sharing TPS know-how and working closely with Rebuild Joplin’s professional staff, skilled construction supervisors and AmeriCorps volunteer members to improve homebuilding efficiencies;
- Better scheduling of volunteers and construction contractors: while there was no organized system before, today, as you enter Rebuild Joplin’s headquarters, “management boards” track everything from volunteer/worker schedules to inventory to status reports on homes being rebuilt.

TSSC’s Sylvester DuPree, who has worked closely with Rebuild Joplin since the onset, points to another success. “One of our main goals coming into Rebuild Joplin was to reduce the amount of time it took from when a home owner applied to when construction began on their house,” he said. “Couple that with reducing the amount of construction time and we are getting people back into their homes faster.”

New Orleans Connection

Rebuild Joplin is the first affiliate of the St. Bernard Project (SBP), a non-profit organization that was founded in 2006 by Zack Rosenberg and Liz McCartney, an attorney and teacher, respectively, from Washington D.C., after they saw the tremendous needs in the New Orleans region following Hurricane Katrina. Following a month of service in the area, the pair started the nonprofit, focusing on finding a solution to fulfilling the needs expressed by community members.

SBP believes that by sharing lessons learned and best practices, disaster recovery in America will be more effective in reducing human toll. Through St. Bernard Project’s Disaster Recovery Lab, a community hit by a natural disaster can get a head start by using these lessons learned and utilized in New Orleans, and, now, Joplin.

“We have seen the toll of delay in post-disaster recovery; clients have died waiting, seniors have had their ‘golden years’ irreparably tarnished, and young people have spent their formative years in untenable living situations,” Rosenberg said. “Understanding the urgent need for a new model – recognizing that disaster recovery in America is broken and that families in other parts of the country impacted by disaster yearn for home as strongly as families in New Orleans – St. Bernard Project decided to share its model with other disaster-impacted communities.”

Developed in collaboration with skill-based corporate partners, Disaster Recovery Lab is an answer to reduce recovery time and minimize the devastating impact of delayed recovery on businesses, government and the social and civic fabric of a community.

Communities at-risk will be trained to develop resilience by understanding and mitigating risks, by learning SBP’s model, understanding challenges that they will face and by developing an initial recovery plan.

Disaster-struck communities will learn SBP’s model, receive a playbook/framework for action and will benefit from technical and on-the-ground support.

“We are a one-year-old organization operating with four-plus years of experience,” said Hogan. “It makes an enormous impact on our ability to serve families.”

#