

A Bright Spot After the Storm

In plan view, the play structure spells out “2011-5-22,” the day an EF-5 tornado, with winds exceeding 200 mph, leveled Cunningham Park and thousands of homes in the town of Joplin, Mo. It was one of the deadliest tornadoes in U.S. history: More than 150 people died and more than 1,000 were injured.

The combination playground-memorial was designed by Theresa Coleman Clement (a *PDB* author from Ambler, Pa.) as part of an *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* project in October 2011 that also included building seven houses in seven days for families who lost their homes to the tornado. In the television show’s typical format, experienced builders volunteered their time and coordinated huge teams of volunteer workers with varying levels of experience; among the builders leading the charge at the park were at least two known to *PDB* readers: Mark Clement of Ambler, Pa., and Greg DiBernardo of Waldwick, N.J. “Everyone pulled

together and it was amazing,” said DiBernardo. “The volunteers worked harder than any person I’ve ever paid.”

DiBernardo added, “Lending my time to this project gave me such a sense of satisfaction. All of us who worked in Joplin left a piece of ourselves there.” Indeed, that was true in a literal sense. “Each timber was set out at the volunteer tent and hundreds signed them,” said Mark Clement. So even as the volunteers were building the playground for the people of Joplin, they also built a tribute to all the donated hours, skill, hard work, and good will that went into it. — Laurie Elden



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