



Committed to Community

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Memorial Day Storms Came with a Silver Lining for East Texans

TYLER, TX (June 9, 2015) When catastrophes happen, communities tend to pull together. Memorial Day Weekend 2015 will go down in history as one of the most destructive in Texas history, but for a few East Texans, the storms came with a silver lining.

Almost eclipsed by the larger storms and devastation across the State was an EF2 tornado that ripped through the small East Texas town of Henderson in the early evening hours of Memorial Day. Around 7pm that Monday evening, the employees of Arnold Abstract Company received notice that the alarm was going off in the building. When they arrived at the two-story building, they noticed limbs and debris covering the parking lot. Once inside, they saw water pouring in on the ground floor. What they didn't know at the time is the tornado had destroyed the roof, most of it ripped away by the twister.

As word started to spread throughout the community, employees, their friends and families – and even strangers! – stepped in to help save the contents of the building. The neighboring building that houses the actual abstract plant was not damaged, so this crew of volunteers immediately started moving electronic equipment and then antiques and files next door. They worked into the night, in the dark (the electricity was out) to get most of the building's contents to safety.

The next morning, during daylight hours, they completed the task. Later in the day on Tuesday, the remaining roof structure collapsed into the building.

In the meantime on Tuesday, Arnold Abstract Company had a real estate closing scheduled. The parties to the transaction were scattered across East Texas, in Smith County, Gregg County and Rusk County. The seller was actually moving out of state the following day, so keeping the closing on schedule was imperative.

Arnold Abstract is an independent title company, which is locally owned and operated by East Texas Title Companies out of Tyler. Celia Flowers, owner of East Texas Title Companies, has worked diligently on disaster recovery over the past several years to ensure her clients are able to conduct business even when catastrophes happen. "We've intentionally built our business to be seamless throughout the East Texas area. Our goal is to bring the closing table to our clients instead of the other way around. We do this through centralized and redundant record-keeping, cutting edge technology, and maintaining a can-do attitude. We've recently added mobile closings to our repertoire," says Flowers. The Henderson tornado would test these efforts.

On early Tuesday morning, Henderson was still without power, so per the disaster recovery plan, the Arnold Abstract phones were electronically forwarded to Tyler. All the files for the closing were backed up both in East Texas and out of area, so they were readily available. Next up was coordination with the lender, the realtors, and the buyer and seller. East Texas Title Companies are all set up to handle courtesy closings at any of their locations, or wherever it's convenient for the parties to the transaction. This particular closing took place at the scheduled time at East Texas Title Company in Tyler.

Realtor Patti Miller, of Rusk County Realty, was relieved: “When I heard Arnold Abstract’s building was damaged, I panicked, because we really needed to close the transaction that very day. The seller was moving out of state on Wednesday, so we had no wiggle room. I’ve been a realtor since 1981, and we still tend to think of title companies with paper files stacked high on desks, but East Texas Title Companies is all electronic. So not only were we able to close on time, but we had our choice of closing locations across East Texas.”

Cindy Weaver, Processor/Closer at Primary Residential Mortgage, had this to say: “This closing went off without a hitch. We had already transmitted the majority of the paperwork to East Texas Title Companies, with only the final docs going out on the day after the storm. From our perspective, the process was extremely smooth. The folks at East Texas Title Companies did all the work necessary to close as scheduled.”

Brandi Abercrombie, Closing Manager for East Texas Title Companies, adds: “We never look forward to testing our disaster recovery plans, but were quite pleased with the outcome. Our company tagline is “committed to community” and I think we – along with all the others involved in this transaction - and all of those who helped us at our building in Henderson – embodied that philosophy.”

Repair work on the Arnold Abstract building is ongoing, but for their clients, it’s business as usual.

East Texas Title Companies is an independently owned and operated group of title companies serving thirteen counties in the East Texas area. Rusk County Realty was started in Henderson 1984 and has steadily grown as an independent, locally owned real estate office. Primary Residential Mortgage is licensed in 49 states and the District of Columbia, and operates more than 280 locations nationwide.

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Arnold Abstract Company employees outside the damaged building, (L to R) Melody Smiley, Karen Baughman, Michelle Pace, Christie Green and Melissa Smith. While the building is being repaired, the Title Company closings will take place in the Abstract Office (right foreground).