

Insider

For June 25, 2008

By Kim Burger

As I sat down to write my article for this edition it was my intention to discuss anything but the flood. After all, tornados and floods are all we've read and talked about for weeks now and it should be time to move on to something else, shouldn't it? I find, however, that I cannot move on - I have a soft dry bed to curl up in and many of my friends and neighbors do not.

Over the last several weeks I've found myself cleaning tornado debris, sandbagging, unsandbagging, scraping up flood soaked carpet, coordinating clean-up volunteers, and most recently trying to decide whether the Sturgis Falls Celebration and Cedar Basin Jazz Festivals could/should go on as planned. In looking back over each of these situations, I am hard pressed to say which of them I am most grateful to have been a part of. It's true that pride in my community, and that means my friends and neighbors, comes easily for me. This is a good thing since that's a lot of what my job is about, but I have to tell you, I find it hard to express my pride in you, my friends and neighbors for the way you have come together. Rather than give up, you chose to focus on the things you could do and you simply stepped up and did what needed to be done. Better yet, you did it not out of obligation, but out of love.

As everyone knows by now, the Sturgis Falls Celebration and Cedar Basin Jazz Festivals scheduled for this weekend will be drastically watered down (pardon the pun) versions of what we have come to expect. I feel compelled to share what an excruciating, yet heartening experience it was to watch as city officials and volunteer board members struggled to reach a decision that we hoped would be the best for all concerned. How could we even think of canceling these events, the largest of our many community celebrations? Are there not two volunteer organizations who have spent an entire year planning these events? Organizations who have paid deposits to book entertainment, purchase airline tickets and so on? Organizations who, by the way, invest proceeds straight back into this community we all love so dearly and provide fundraisers for other service groups? Also, do we not deserve to celebrate? We pulled together and faced that river saving as much as was humanly possible. We saved our water supply and our downtown business district.

On the other hand, our victory was not complete. A good number of our friends and neighbors have lost everything. Many have taken shelter in area hotels who are bound to honor previously made reservations. How could we justify booting a displaced neighbor from our hotels with precious little relocation options to bring in a trombone player for the band? Although they were willing to help, how could we possibly pull our utilities and public works crews from the important work of restoring fundamental services to set up for a festival? How could the police protect the north part of our town and still provide the traffic control and security necessary to accommodate the crowds these festivals bring?

These are the questions that were considered as we faced this dilemma. As I have found to be the case in previous dealings with these groups, these questions were seriously and creatively addressed. Yes, there would be criticism awaiting us whatever the outcome, but I believe we made the best possible decision - the most respectful decision.

As oftentimes must be the case when mature decision-making occurs, a compromise has been struck. The shows will go on, albeit in a slightly different fashion. The parades, food, children's activities, family entertainment, street fair, and an abbreviated Dixieland schedule will go on. The two festivals will join together in and around Overman Park for an alcohol-free event that will allow friends and relatives to gather together without stressing our already exhausted public safety personnel. A complete and revised schedule can be found at [www.sturgisfalls.org](http://www.sturgisfalls.org) or [www.cedarbasinjazz.org](http://www.cedarbasinjazz.org).

I believe we were purposely created to be dependent on one another and recent weeks have demonstrated that our community understands that. I am grateful. We have a lot of rebuilding to do, and we have the spirit to do it. Come out and claim your place as a valued member of this community – come out and celebrate your role as a Hometown Hero.