



# PICKING UP THE PIECES

Community grapples with tornado devastation

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COVER PHOTO BY ANNA LEACHMAN  
After an EF3 tornado passed through Bowling Green early Saturday morning on Dec. 11, 2021, a family walks down Magnolia Street to see the debris left behind.

# Bowling Green's tornadoes through students' eyes

By Genesis Malone and Michael Crimmins

WKU students Mia Botkins and Comfort Gimba huddled inside Regents Hall as the Dec. 11 tornadoes passed less than half a mile away.

Many students were still occupying residence halls when the storm passed.

"We were advised to stay away from windows, and many of our RAs were giving us directions on where to go and where the safe areas were," Gimba said.

Gimba, a student from Texas, is all too familiar with tornado warnings. Tornadoes touching down close to campus was a shocking and devastating event to see, she said.

"Once we were getting the alerts, I alerted my parents and let them know what was going on down here because we were seeing a lot of damage and fires and people trapped, and at that point I felt that we were next to get hit," Gimba said.

Students were advised to stay in the residents halls during the storm, many unable to see the extent of the damage.

"We heard a lot of talk of damages from other buildings and restaurants but most of us didn't believe it until the next day when we went out and saw the damages ourselves," Botkins said. "I was really shocked to see how it destroyed so much and how there

were so many people affected, it was sad."

Gimba then began to contemplate recovery efforts. She said there were many affected and would need help getting back on their feet.

"I was devastated to see how quickly a community can be standing one minute and destroyed the next," Gimba said. "The questions of 'How people are going to go on after this? Will there possibly be another disaster?' I was more worried about all those things than anything else."

Trevor Huddleston, a junior at WKU who studies sport management, organized with his fraternity brothers to aid in cleanup. Huddleston was in his apartment near campus the night of the tornado, just a block from where it moved through town.

"That night, I'll be honest, was probably the scariest night of my life," Huddleston said. "I've been in the hospital before when I was a kid. I've had my body hooked up to numerous machines and none of that comes anywhere near as scared as I was that night."

Huddleston hid in his closet with his dog after receiving the alerts. He said he did not feel secure or safe in his apartment so he drove to his fraternity house, which was the safest and closest place he could think of.

"I picked up my dog and got in my car, I didn't even lock my apartment,

and I drove over to my fraternity house as quickly as I possibly could," Huddleston said.

Huddleston and several of his Alpha Tau Omega brothers were still in the Bowling Green area when the disaster struck. Huddleston said the first thing on his mind was how he could help his community.

"The first thing we wanted to do [after the tornado] was, we wanted to help out in the community as soon as we possibly could and wherever they needed us," Huddleston said.

Originally from Pittsburgh, Huddleston said he is unfamiliar with this type of weather. His desire to give back to the community came in part because of the "southern hospitality" he received when he came to WKU.

"Making that transition, going from high school to a new part of the United States and starting a new chapter in your life is scary for a lot of people, and being a student at Western you just get that southern hospitality," Huddleston said.

"That's what makes living here such a blessing, knowing that you're going to have people here for you that are going to help you in whichever way they possibly can."

The following Sunday, he was ready and looking for ways to help Bowling Green. He received a text message from one of his fraternity brothers mentioning helping the owner of WK

Liquors.

"One of our alumni received a phone call [from the owner of WK Liquors] saying that he needs a lot of help with the store, and so me and several friends all got together and said, 'Let's go, let's help, let's get over there as soon as we can and start working,'" Huddleston said. "And so for about three-and-a-half to four hours we were picking up the area, the debris, doing whatever we could do to help."

While there, Huddleston helped collect the unscathed bottles and load them into a trailer for storage. He also aided in cleaning up the destroyed shelves, shattered wine bottles and broken boxes that remained in the remnants of the store.

"It's really opened my eyes to appreciating your life and saying that you can't take stuff for granted because just with a snap of a finger you can lose everything," Huddleston said.

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# 'I am a real person': How social media shapes creative lives

By Debra Murray

From pictures of vibrant colored flowers and bright smiles to photos at local businesses, Alexis Mueller shares most of her life with her 50,000 Instagram followers.

Mueller creates lifestyle and fashion content, while also studying marketing with a concentration in sales at WKU.

"I started to post pretty consistently and have an overall aesthetic to my page," Mueller said. "When I started to do that, that's when a few companies started to slowly reach out to me. Then I started to reach out and email companies on my own and that's when it all really began."

Despite this, Mueller finds that social media has negative impacts on her mental health.

According to a study by USwitch, Americans are spending up to 53 minutes a day on apps like Instagram, which is approximately 297 hours a year, a little over 12 days.

"I would say a con would be getting too wrapped up in it all, I like to set a timer on how much I'm allowing myself to be on social media and to instead read a book, workout, take a bath, make a meal and to be in the moment actually," Mueller said. "It has to be a good balance."

In order to manage content for her Instagram, Mueller has "batch content days" where she shoots as much content as she needs at once.

"A couple days before, I'll plan out my outfits and try to find certain locations to compliment the outfit and to just have fun and get creative with it," Mueller said. "Then when it comes to the content day, I'll take around 6-8 pictures to have for the week. I also always love to get in-the-moment unplanned pictures too because those are always the best."

Mueller currently studies marketing with a concentration in sales. She said being an influencer aligns with her



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXIS MUELLER

career aspirations within social media marketing and the fashion industry. She plans to continue growing her following after she graduates.

"It definitely is a challenge managing both content creation and schoolwork, I have to stay really disciplined about leaving time for both homework and social media equally," Mueller said. "But [I] wanted to be able to do both because content creating is my passion."

Mueller said social media helps her find inspiration for content, outfits and many other aspects of her life, but it has also been a way for her to make friends

all over the world.

"I also have met so many friends from all over the world from social media who do what I do and we always hype up and support each other," Mueller said.

Despite content creation being Mueller's job, social media still takes a toll on her. Comparing yourself to what others post to social media is a habit Mueller and many others deal with due to seeing what people choose to share online.

"It definitely can have a negative and both positive impact on my mental



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXIS MUELLER



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXIS MUELLER

health, when it comes to social media everyone is usually only putting out their best moments and not the real stuff of what is happening behind the scenes, and you really have to keep in mind to not compare, it's not a race," Mueller said. "Whatever is meant for you will be yours' is what I try and tell myself when I catch myself comparing my life to others on social media and where I'm at with it."

According to the Pew Research Center, 69% of U.S. adults are social media users. Social media is especially popular among younger adults, as 86%

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

but I still thought probably it's okay, but I continued to put supplies in front of it," Hudepohl said.

Hudepohl set her alarm for 2:30 a.m., when it was reported the storms would likely be in Bowling Green, and then fell asleep in her living room watching the news.

"I woke up for whatever reason like at 1 o'clock to the news reporting on WBKO that there was a radar indicating a likely tornado," Hudepohl said. "I just leapt up, ran to my closet, and grabbed one of my cats I saw. I put a cushion over our head from the living room couch and stayed there. It came right over my house."

The living room that Hudepohl was asleep in was destroyed. Both of her cats survived.

While her life has been completely turned upside down, Hudepohl is thankful for the support she's received from her community.

"My heart is full," Hudepohl said. "I was working here with my parents earlier, and these community members showed up with heavy duty equipment and chainsaws and backhoes. All these piles of rubble at the curb they moved."

Angie Link, the office coordinator for ISEC at WKU and a Bowling Green resident for 25 years, lives on Meadowbrook Circle and lost everything in the storm.

Her husband was watching the storm from the front door when the roof began to collapse, and he ran to the master bedroom as the front part of the house fell.

"I guess he forgot I was in the restroom," Link said. "I was afraid to look up but I could see his feet. He came through here and glass was hitting him and he was barefooted."

He moved past the bathroom, making his way into the master bedroom, eventually seeking refuge in the master bathroom.

"I don't say I heard the freight train sound, I guess I dazed out," Link said. "The only thing I really heard I remember is my house caving in, I heard it crumbling."

Only three rooms in the house remain relatively untouched, including her master bedroom, her daughter's

room and the living room.

"You don't expect anything like this to happen," Link said. "It was quick, it was powerful, and you're just saying, 'Did this just happen to me?' You're scared, you're shaking, you're praying. I'm screaming and crying just saying 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.' My husband is running down the hallway screaming 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.' It is surreal."

Like many who have experienced damage, Link has been overwhelmed



Michael Dylan Payne

A limb from the large tree that slammed into the Basham's home landed at the headboard of their master bedroom. "If we would have been in bed, we would have been killed," Basham said.

with community outreach and the support she's received.

"We have people coming from different places here in the community — don't know them, never seen them — Bowling Green is the best," Link said. "If you need something to wear, something to eat, they're there for you. Everyone has just been so good."

Link's entire neighborhood was destroyed, and she said what is getting her through the toughest of it is her faith.

"Jesus is good," Link said. "He has sustained all of us through this situation. You know, I keep thinking about him, my husband is running for his life down the hallway and he escaped. It's amazing."

Since the tornado, thousands of volunteers and workers have flooded the

Bowling Green community, many from outside the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Clay Mullins, the global impact pastor at Living Hope Baptist Church in Bowling Green, was tasked with coordinating the flood of volunteers from around the county and said that the outpouring is unlike anything he has experienced.

"It's been incredible," Mullins said. "We're still putting the final numbers in,

of volunteer efforts and has been out in the community. Operations were turned back over to the city during the second week of January. He spoke to several survivors early on and noted the undertones of their conversations.

"There was an old saying about the Vietnam Veterans, that some would come home with a 1,000-yard stare, and it seemed like there was a bit of that [talking with survivors]," Mullins said. "When you would have a conversation with someone, they would be with you in the conversation verbally, but their eyes were elsewhere. You could tell their minds were divided. The word 'trauma' doesn't do justice to what I've observed some people experiencing."

With the amount of trauma the community has seen, Mullins said it's important for people to remember that they are not alone, and there is still healing to be done.

"I know there are counseling services all over," Mullins said. "You have the Hope Center for Biblical Counseling that is there gearing up to provide free counseling services to anyone that needs to talk through this. They're putting together support groups and individual counseling to help people as they deal with the aftermath from this."

Mullins said serving in his community after the storm has been one of the most meaningful experiences of his life.

"I have been amazed at the city that we live in, and the people of this city and how they have rallied around those who have been so deeply affected," Mullins said. "I am so proud to be a part of a city of this caliber."

In addition to the Hope Center, counseling services are available in the same facility as FEMA in the Sears wing of the mall, free of charge provided by LifeSkills of Bowling Green. They can also be reached at 270-901-5000 if individuals need to schedule in-person or telehealth visits according to their office.

*Michael Dylan Payne can be reached at michael.payne993@topper.wku.edu. Follow him on Twitter @mdpayne\_.*

Mullins has coordinated the majority

# Meteorology students aid in tornado survey

By Jake Moore

WKU's meteorology department was wide awake in the early morning hours of Dec. 11, updating the WKU community in the time leading up to the tornadoes that tore through Bowling Green.

"We were well aware that there was a prominent severe weather threat and that a tornado threat was certainly on the table," Joshua Durkee, WKU's university meteorologist, said. "Trying to make an application as to whether or not a tornado is going to hit your town, that's pretty much impossible, but the general outlook was 'yes.'"

The system moved through town Friday night of finals week after many students had already left campus. The program did its best to warn those who were still there.

"We were already paying attention to the storm [Friday night], we were tracking the storm and warning people since it was finals week and people were still down here," Dustin Knight, a meteorology major, said.

Once the storm touched down and left its path of destruction, those inside the program knew there was work to be done.

"We knew we were going to do something [the next day]," Knight said.

John Gordon, the meteorologist in charge at the National Weather Service of Louisville, reached out to Durkee to see if students wanted to help with the official tornado survey, which measures the strength of a tornado based on debris patterns and damage.

"We have a wonderful relationship with the weather service office

up there and John Gordon's been up there a number of years," Durkee said. "It's just sort of an unwritten, unspoken relationship that if the weather service is in town, we're here to help."

The group, led by Gordon, began searching for signs of major damage, such as homes destroyed to their foundations, large trees that had been twisted and mangled and pieces of debris that had been tossed through strong materials.

"[Gordon] was looking for specific things that were out of place," Bret Garlitz, a junior in the meteorology program, said. In one case, the group came across a decorative boulder that had been tipped over and moved several feet.

"So then [Gordon] takes pictures of that, makes a note of it and plugs it into an app, which then generates

a value of how much wind was needed to do that."

Garlitz said the group found a wooden plank that penetrated a car tire, leading them to suspect a rating of at least EF2.

According to Knight, by examining the ways in which the storm affected various structures, the information from the survey can be put to use when rebuilding to ensure homes and businesses will be able to withstand severe weather in the future.

"We're not only looking for damage like, 'This house was destroyed to its foundation, this must have been an F3; this house was destroyed, this must have been an F4,'" Knight said. "Our thing is looking for ways to prevent these tragedies from happening in the future."

Knight knows that the opportuni-



Photo courtesy of Joshua Durkee

WKU Meteorology alumna Sylvia Stinnett (second from left), WKU Engineering staff Tyler Baker (center) and Jason Wilson (second from right) survey tornado wreckage with members of the National Weather Service in the Trans Park facilities.



Photo courtesy of Joshua Durkee

WKU Engineering faculty Jason Wilson (left), National Weather Service of Louisville Meteorologist-in-Charge Gordon (center) and a group of WKU meteorology students investigate debris in the Moss Creek Neighborhood.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

ty came due to a terrible crisis, but takes comfort knowing this data is crucial to helping those down the road.

“Storms are always going to happen, but figuring out the best ways to build, the best ways to shelter, the best ways to warn people, those are the ways we’re going to prevent these tragedies from happening,” Knight said.

The event, while tragic in nature, gave meteorology students experiences they would never have had access to otherwise. Durkee was glad his students were able to participate in such a hands-on way.

“The philosophy of our program, which is the mantra of the university, is applied learning,” Durkee said. “Everything I do with my students is an attempt to offer them those types of experiences.”

As local and national news outlets spotlighted the survey team, Durkee was proud of the work his

students put in throughout the process and the way his students represented WKU and the meteorol-

ogy program.

“As a parent, at home, my job is very parental,” Durkee said. “You’re



Photo courtesy of Joshua Durkee

John Gordon (center) and a group of meteorology students speaks to a builder near Browning and Van Meter Roads.

trying to shape these young adults in the waking moments of their future, and to see them step to the line and pull it together is impressive. It’s endearing and it’s everything that I could hope for. [I’m] always proud of these students.”

Durkee is aware that the work was optional; students could have begun their breaks or traveled home to see family. He is grateful for those that volunteered their time and effort.

“They didn’t have to do any of this stuff,” Durkee said. “A lot of these people, and rightfully so, they went home for break and whatnot, and you had a handful that were able to stick around, get up early and stay late, eat weird meals and do it all for free, just to learn. As a professor, I can’t ask for anything better. These students are wonderful.”

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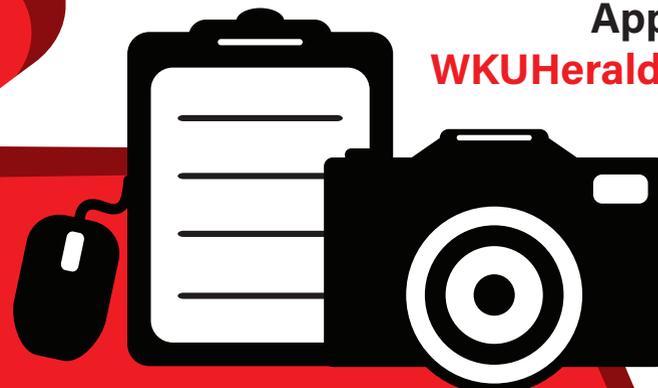


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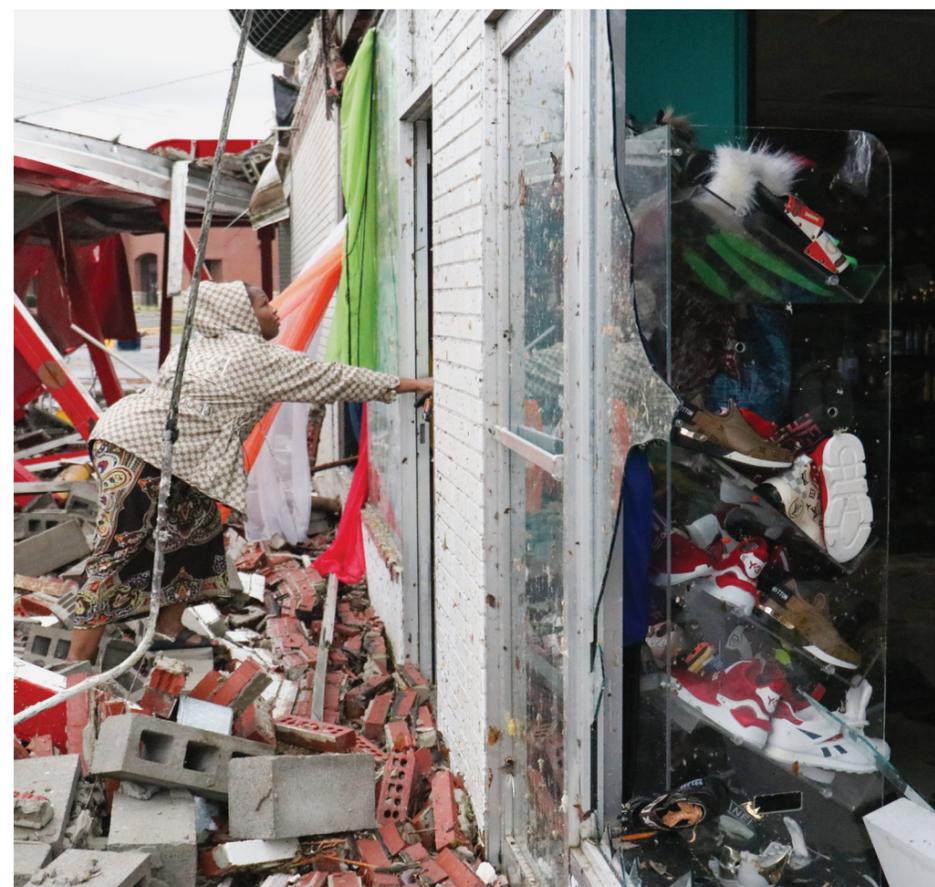


# RISING from the RUBBLE

By Herald Photo Staff

No one was prepared for the destruction discovered in the early morning hours of Dec. 11. Just hours after a tornado swept through the city, the community came together to pick up the pieces. Individuals and groups from Bowling Green and beyond went out to help move debris from the streets and aid families salvaging what they could from the rubble. From local churches to out-of-town volunteers, everyone pitched in to help the community build

back stronger. Volunteers flooded the area offering their time and energy to those in need. Laborers with chainsaws and heavy machinery removed trees and large debris from roads and front yards, allowing emergency services to pass unimpeded. At South Warren High School, only hours after the tornado swept through the area, volunteers flocked to set up a recovery center, bringing with them cleaning supplies, food and clothing to distribute to their neighbors in need.



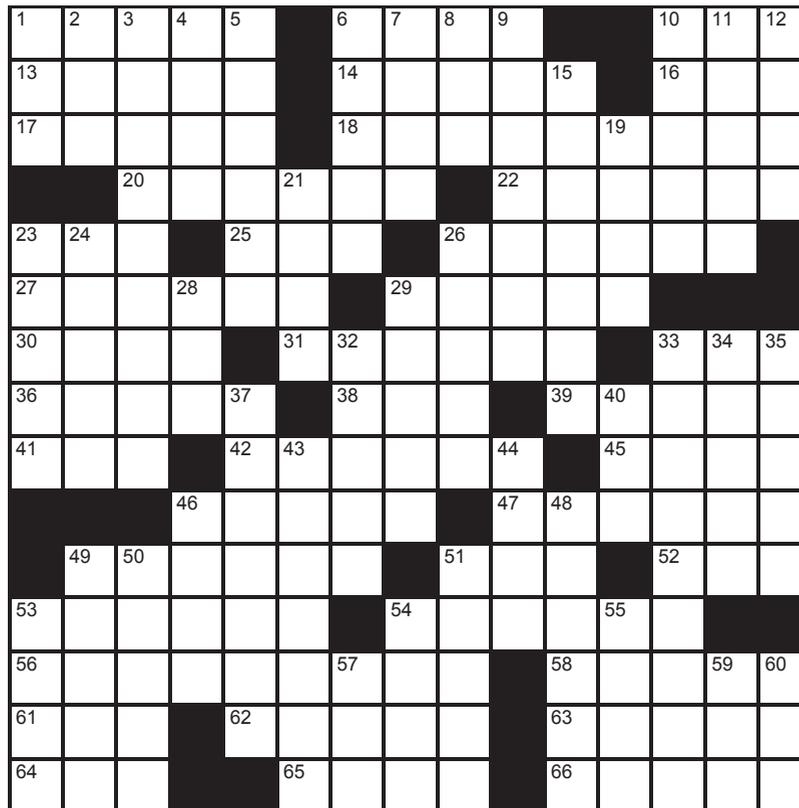
**Top Left:** A volunteer carries relief supplies into South Warren High School on Dec. 11. The school was providing supplies for those affected by the storm and is housing victims whose homes were destroyed. (Jack Dobbs) **Top Right:** A group of community members work together to remove debris after tornadoes and severe weather swept through Bowling Green on Dec. 11. (Megan Fisher) **Bottom Left:** Business owner Emerita Ciza sees her salon for the first time after the tornadoes. She unlocked the door to retrieve her phone charger from inside the building. Despite the shattered windows on either side, she relocked the door behind her out of habit. (Anna Leachman) **Bottom Right:** A landlord navigates the ruins of his property in one of the neighborhoods off of the US 31-W Bypass. The bypass and the residential areas nearby saw some of the worst damage from the Dec. 11 tornadoes, with many businesses and homes completely destroyed. (Jack Dobbs)

A supply station set up the morning after the tornadoes in South Warren Middle School. Volunteers donated food, water and clothing for those affected by the tornado. (Jack Dobbs)

# Fun Page

## Across

- 1 Prevent
- 6 Vases
- 10 Take steps
- 13 Helpful
- 14 Crannies' pals
- 16 Kind of jacket
- 17 Raptor
- 18 French cheese
- 20 Balloon filler
- 22 Creates a picture
- 23 Position
- 25 Summer hrs. in D.C.
- 26 Walked
- 27 Holiday event
- 29 Horse trots
- 30 English river
- 31 Meager
- 33 Actor Kilmer
- 36 Store sections (Abbr.)
- 38 Kind of nut
- 39 Indian side dish
- 41 Compass pt.
- 42 Pressed
- 45 Operatic prince
- 46 Go-between

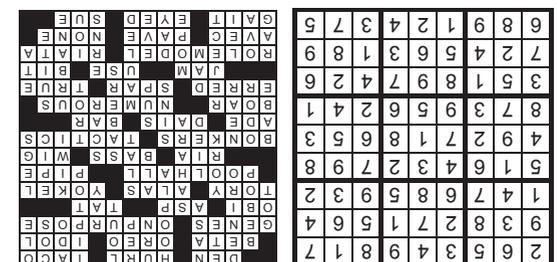


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## Down

- |                             |                                   |                            |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Fitting                   | 15 More stylish or brainier       | 40 River islet             |
| 2 Greek vowel               | 19 Life stories, briefly          | 43 Feels remorse           |
| 3 Circus wire               | 21 March date                     | 44 Apothecary's weight     |
| 4 Model                     | 23 Garden tool                    | 46 Camera position         |
| 5 Staggered                 | 24 Roof overhangs                 | 48 Noah's landfall         |
| 6 Full-length, like a movie | 26 <i>Beetle Bailey</i> character | 49 Recluse                 |
| 7 Wander about              | 28 Pantry pest                    | 50 Command                 |
| 8 ___ de guerre             | 29 Scrawny                        | 51 Usurp, usually by force |
| 9 Doubter                   | 32 Duplicate                      | 53 Minute arachnid         |
| 10 Modify                   | 33 Close attention                | 54 Pinnacle                |
| 11 À la ___                 | 34 Make reparations               | 55 Short run               |
| 12 Small fry                | 35 Florida's Key ___              | 57 Fishing aid             |
|                             | 37 Warning signs                  | 59 Male cat                |
|                             |                                   | 60 Fr. holy woman          |

Previous crossword solution:



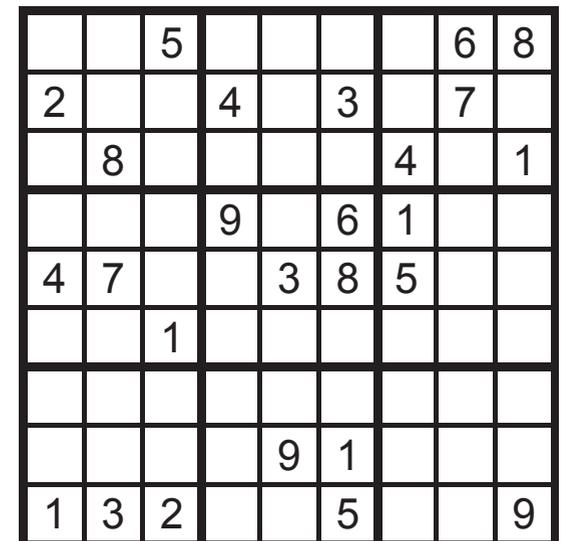
## Geography Variety

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1. How many hours behind Greenwich Mean Time is California?  
(a) 6 hours (b) 12 hours (c) 8 hours
2. In which city is the Bridge of Sighs?  
(a) Prague (b) Venice (c) Paris
3. What is Germany's most easterly major city?  
(a) Dresden (b) Munich (c) Leipzig
4. What Mediterranean island is nicknamed The George Cross Island?  
(a) Corsica (b) Majorca (c) Malta
5. Madagascar is separated from the mainland of Africa by what body of water?  
(a) Zimbabwe channel (b) Mozambique channel (c) Durban channel
6. What is the busiest cargo port in Europe?  
(a) Rotterdam (b) Hamburg (c) Antwerp
7. How many bridges are there over the Firth of Forth?  
(a) 4 (b) 2 (c) 3
8. To the nearest million, what was the population of Wales in 2001?  
(a) 3 million (b) 5 million (c) 1 million
9. How many fountains are in the gardens at the Palace of Versailles?  
(a) 1400 (b) 1200 (c) 800
10. What country has a river known as the 'liquid rainbow'?  
(a) Curacao (b) Colombia (c) Ukraine

Solution  
1. c  
2. b  
3. a  
4. a  
5. b  
6. a  
7. c  
8. b  
9. a  
10. b

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, each row, column, and box must contain the numbers 1 to 9.



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COLLEGE HEIGHTS  
HERALD

Print edition published monthly  
by WKU Student Publications at  
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First copy: free | Additional copies: \$1

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# Kentucky is more than its politicians: A fight against tornado blame

By Rose Donnelly

In the twilight hours after the tornado touched down, people trickled out of their homes to assess the damage. Powerlines down, live wires lying limp on the pavement, insulation entwined in the treetops, shards of wood puncturing windshields and wet ground.

A warzone-esque sight of 31W Bypass and Russellville Road left many speechless as the sounds of distant sirens filled the air.

The tragedy that blew through the midwest changed life in Bowling Green as we know it. With local businesses and homes flattened, our city looked surreal.

Families seen calling loved ones with tears in their eyes, overheard conversations of “I’m okay, we’re okay; but Bowling Green was hit.”

The response from the community within hours was amazing. People of all ages and backgrounds coming together and helping each other clean up.

Although the responses from the community were uplifting, the responses on social media portrayed the natural disaster as a blame fest. Who was culpable? Us.

Writer and producer Nell Scovell blamed Kentuckians.



Noel Scovell  
@NellSco

**Sorry Kentucky. Maybe if your 2 senators hadn't spent decades blocking legislation to reduce climate change, you wouldn't be suffering from climate disasters. If it's any consolation, McConnell and Rand have f'ed over all of us, too.**

5:02 AM · Dec 11, 2021 · Twitter Web App

Director and actor Taika Waititi, with his less-than-sensitive tweet regarding the destruction of a movie theater in Mayfield.



Taika Waititi  
@TaikaWaititi

Breaking the 4th wall.



Rex Chapman  
@RexChap... · 12/14/21

This photo from the local Mayfield, Kentucky movie theater is haunting...

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7:22 PM · 12/14/21 · Twitter for iPhone

Hateful comments ran rampant through Twitter, blaming Kentucky for our misfortunes due to the senators we elected. Senators Rand Paul and Mitch McConnell were targeted in these tweets as the perpetrators of climate change.

When the power went out, people went to Twitter and Facebook to keep an eye on what was happening around them. Twitter was how many college students and citizens of Bowling Green knew what had happened in Western Kentucky that night.

Social media is a helpful tool to engage and facilitate action, but the way these platforms operate can make it harder to stay present in times of hardship. People become so far removed from real life that hateful and blameful comments are made to innocent victims.

Did Senators Mitch McConnell and Rand Paul win their elections in

Kentucky? Yes. Does that mean all Kentuckians voted for them? No. Are all Kentuckians religious and a part of the Southern Baptist chain of churches? No.

Why then is it appropriate or even correct to correlate a natural disaster to biblical punishment? No senator or Kentuckian alone could've stopped these tornadoes from tearing our community apart.

People died, homes were lost, communities were leveled and the pitiful response was to blame us. Kentucky didn't “deserve this,” and for that matter, no one does.

Hiding behind the comfort of one's own device is cowardly. These communities deserve more than being criticized for something no one could have stopped.

Our senators should not be solely blamed for climate change either. Kentucky cannot be blamed for all human involvement of the rising temperatures globally.

Be angry with the state of global climate change, but don't take that frustration out on people who, just hours before, witnessed their communities being torn apart.

In this time of uncertainty, be mindful of your social media presence and what you say to or about groups of people in their time of recovering and rebuilding. Stay present in the fragility of hurting families who mourn the loss of loved ones or the destruction they are left with.

The courage shown in recent weeks is more than most people can ever fathom. Kentucky is more than its politicians. To define a group of unique and diverse people to rednecks and idiots shows more about your character than our own.

*Commentary Editor Rose Donnelly can be reached at rose.donnelly430@topper.wku.edu. Follow her on Twitter @RoseDonnelly\_*

# International bonds key to WKU Tennis' success

By Izzy Lanuza

WKU Tennis started its season with, its best start in Division I program history. Along with its hot start, the Lady Toppers have the most diverse sports program at WKU with seven of its nine players coming from outside the U.S.

Most of the team is from South America, and they regularly speak Spanish.

"I have two teammates from Venezuela, and one from Bolivia," Redshirt sophomore Paola Cortez said. "They're similar to my culture, they're very close. Then, Laura [Bernardos] is from Spain. She's very, very nice. Also Cora[-Lynn von Dungern] is from Germany, she's a sweetheart. We don't have any issues between each other. We try to help each other a lot with everything we need."

Cortez is from Bolivia in South America. She said the people there are very different from in the U.S.; they're very familiar and warm.

Cortez became interested in tennis after watching her cousins, brother and dad play. Before long, she was on the court playing with her whole family.

"I got my first tennis racket when I was like five," Cortez said. "I started practicing when I was six, and then I started competing when I was eight, then [I] started winning championships [and] nationals."

Cortez originally came to the U.S. to play tennis at Kennesaw State in Georgia. She played there for two years before putting herself in the transfer portal.

"At the end of my second year, I didn't have a good experience with my coach," Cortez said. "We kind of were not on the same page anymore."

WKU coach Greg Davis saw Cortez in the transfer portal and started reaching out to her about potentially joining the team. Davis told Cortez that her experience at WKU would be

different than at Kennesaw State.

"I really like him, and I think he really likes us," Cortez said. "And he's excited for the season. We're excited for the season. We're on the same page."

Davis is looking for the best players for his team and he saw that Cortez fit his criteria.

"They've got to be high achievers, academically and athletically," Davis said. "I gotta see both of those."

Cortez reached out to the members on the WKU Tennis team to get a feel for the other players. She said they were so nice and welcoming to her she decided to join the team.

Cortez's teammate, sophomore Samantha Martinez, is from Venezuela. Tennis is not a very popular sport in Venezuela, she said. There aren't many tournaments, so Martinez would travel internationally to play. If she wanted to practice, she would have to drive an hour away from her home to the courts.

Martinez was recruited after she posted a video of her play on YouTube. Martinez reached out to Davis for a spot on the Lady Toppers' team.

"We started talking, and he said even though my ranking wasn't as high as it should be, he believed in me," Martinez said. "He said I had to work as hard as I can."

The tennis culture in the States is very different from Venezuela, Martinez said. The junior tournaments that Martinez used to play in are different from the college competition she plays in now.

"I used to play just on my own," Martinez said. "I was playing for me and now I am playing for a team... You still have a lot of pressure, but you have the team, you know that the team is always going to be there to support you."

Martinez has been able to improve her skill and knowledge about the sport despite this change.

"I know more; what I have to do

well when I'm playing, what I have to do when I'm playing bad," Martinez said.

Her knowledge and skill wouldn't be what it is today without her teammates. The team is like a family, especially since most of their families are a continent away. When the team isn't on the courts, they are with each other relaxing. They have movie nights and study dates.

Martinez said the team is "always gonna be there to support you." This love for each other translates to the courts.

"You don't have to get better only for yourself, you have to get better for your teammates," Cortez said. "You have to win for your teammates."

With a team so close, it can be a stressful process bringing in a new recruit.

"I come across a lot of really good players, but I don't like what I'm hearing about them," Davis said. "Meaning, as a transfer, sometimes those things concern me when I've got a group that gets along together."

The team needs to be strong both internally and externally. If the team isn't getting along, they may not do as well in matches.

"You have to navigate from the front of the bus to the back of the bus," Davis said. "Whether it's the top player, or the last player — they've got to all be on board, drinking from the same Kool-Aid and pulling on the rope in the right direction."

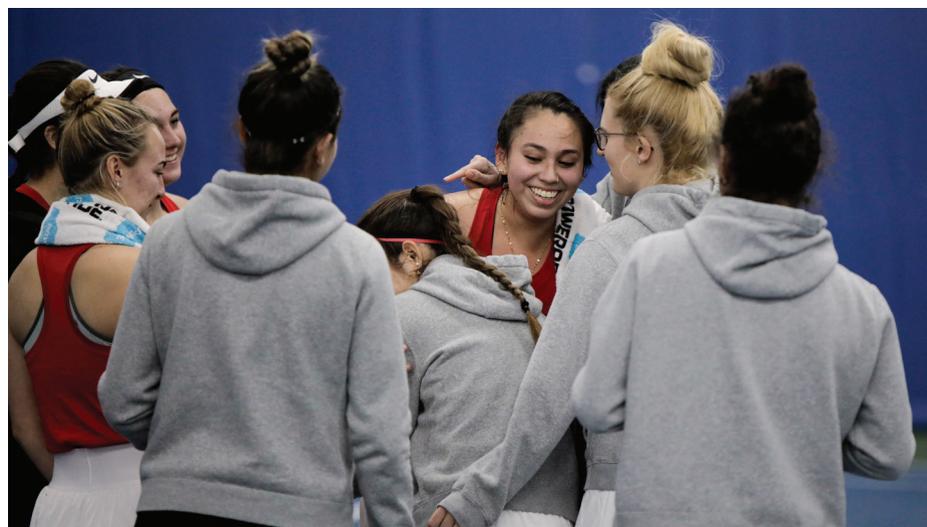
This season, the players are competing as a team, rather than playing individually like they did in the fall. There's more pressure when playing as a team; one player can be on the court deciding if the team wins or loses.

Many of the new players haven't played in a team setting before. Davis is not sure how they will respond to the pressure. He is trying to develop comfort between the pairs.

"I'm so happy here and I'm glad I transferred, because I'm happier than ever," Cortez said. "I know it's going to be a great season, because we have a great team now."

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*Sports Editor Wyatt Sparkman contributed to this story.*



**ARTHUR H. TRICKETT-WILE**

Western Kentucky University Hilltoppers women's tennis team celebrate with redshirt sophomore Paola Cortez (center) after she won the last set in their match against Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis Jaguars on the afternoon of Sunday, Feb. 6, 2022, at Michael O. Buchanan Park's tennis facility. WKU won the match 7-0.

# Part of a bigger family

Bowling Green business owner cherishes community support



**ABOVE LEFT:** Bottles of Evan Williams bourbon sit within the wreckage of WK Liquors in Bowling Green Dec. 11. In the aftermath of the December tornadoes, the popular store only had one wall that remained standing. (Photo by Jack Dobbs) **ABOVE RIGHT:** On the afternoon of Friday, Jan. 14, Manojkumar Patel stands on the leveled ground where his store, WK Liquors, was destroyed by a tornado that damaged many buildings along the US 31W Bypass in Bowling Green. (Photo by Arthur Trickett-Wile)



## SPONSORED BY WK LIQUORS

After tornadoes traveled through Bowling Green and down the US 31W Bypass on Dec. 11, almost the entirety of WK Liquors was gone. Unlike any liquor store in Bowling Green, WK Liquors had photos of WKU students on the walls and the owner's friendly face behind the register.

Manojkumar Patel, the owner of WK Liquors, opened the store in 2019. He received a photo of the store at 3:13 a.m. Dec. 11 from one of his salesmen showing the rubble of the store.

"It came as a total shock," Patel said. "It was kind of difficult to accept that everything is gone."

WKU alumna Natalie Kelley describes Patel as "a pillar of the community." Kelley started a GoFundMe for Patel after hearing about the destruction of the store. The fundraiser surpassed her goal of \$10,000 — by the

time it closed, Kelley raised \$15,061. After GoFundMe fees, Patel received \$14,458 on Jan. 4.

"I did this for Manoj because of the kindness he has shown me and everyone that has come into contact with him since he opened the store," Kelley said. "Every time I have visited the store, he has made sure to ask me how I am and questions about whatever we have talked about previously. I just wanted to return the kindness he has shown to me and countless others in his time of need."

Patel said he is grateful for the community efforts and that Kelley's work shows "goodwill through and through."

"Manoj couldn't say 'Thank you' enough for all the support and donations he received from everyone in the WKU and Bowling Green community," Kelley said.

Kelley said Patel described the

support he received as being part of a bigger family.

"Based on the fact that we have such a healthy community spirit, you have a sense of well-being," Patel said. "You basically want to step up to the plate and overcome this adversity and actually move on."

From homecoming queens, Greek council and WKU students stopping in on their 21st birthdays, WK Liquors had many photos of students.

"[(The photos)] started off very, very slowly because it's having to gain the trust of the community that you're actually serving," Patel said. "It comes with a lot of patience."

Even after the tornado, Patel was able to salvage many of the photos that were gifted to him by WKU students.

"The photos are still going to go up on the wall because it is just going to be remembered as part of the tornado," he said. "How can I delete memorabilia

that has impacted me personally? So I went back and made sure I tried to get back as much as I could."

Another piece of "memorabilia" that Patel salvaged from the tornado was a mirror gifted to him by WKU students.

"When I opened the store, there was a group of I think four or five young ladies that came and seen that the bathroom didn't have a mirror and they all signed their names on the back of the mirror," Patel said.

While this was a tremendous loss for Patel, he remains positive through the support from his community and plans to reopen eventually in the same location.

"I'm a firm believer [that] if you accept the community as your own in your own need, they will actually come to your rescue," Patel said. "That's definitely been the greatest lesson of this entire disaster."

# WKU Athletics provides needed escape for fans

By Wyatt Sparkman

The devastation and destruction after an EF3 tornado ripped through the city of Bowling Green on Dec. 11 left residents hopeless. WKU Athletics did its part to help people in need by raising money and giving them an escape for a few hours at a time.

“What we’ve tried to do is just do our part,” WKU Athletic Director Todd Stewart said. “I really think in Bowling Green, Kentucky, we’ve seen the best of America, in terms of everybody just helping their neighbor out, in many cases, strangers helping complete strangers, people just rolling up their sleeves and helping out.”

Stewart explained that WKU Athletics and sports as a whole can play an important role in the aftermath of a tragedy by providing those affected with a temporary reprieve.

“First and foremost, sometimes we can help just by doing what we do, just give people something to focus on away from their troubles and a diversion, so to speak,” Stewart said. “Something to feel good about and just to kind of take their mind off of things.”

There was no better opportunity for the university to provide that escape than on Dec. 18. WKU Football and Basketball each played in nationally televised games that afternoon, making history in both.

WKU Football played in the Boca Raton Bowl on ESPN and dominated the Appalachian State Mountaineers 59-38, handing the school its first-ever bowl game loss. The main story of the day was the record-setting performance by WKU quarterback Bailey Zappe.

Zappe threw for 422 yards and six touchdowns in the victory. His performance handed him the single-season FBS records for passing yards and touchdowns, finishing the year with 5,967 and 62, respectively.

“[Bowling Green was] definitely on

our mind the whole game, talking to the team before we left the hotel, we said ‘Hey, bowl games are important, winning is important, but it means more today,’” WKU head coach Tyson Helton said after the win. “It just meant more today to us because we knew our state and our community was going to be watching, and we needed to make them feel good.”

“That’s the beauty of football,” Helton continued. “It brings everybody together, and when we needed to bring everybody together, I’m sure they were back at home watching. We love them. Bowling Green is such a great town and great community and when the tornadoes hit, we all embraced and loved each other and went to work, and they’re continuing to work. We just wanted them to take a little break watching football and see the Hilltoppers win.”

Before the game, The Black and Gold Podcast, a show dedicated to Appalachian State sports, set up a GoFundMe to help with tornado relief by benefiting Western Kentucky Regional Blood Center Inc. The original goal was \$3,333, but \$20,956 has been raised as of Jan 10.

“You give [Appalachian State] 100% respect. That’s awesome to see,” Zappe said before the bowl game. “Being opponents and everything, there’s kind of some feuding playing this weekend together, but for them to do that and reach out, [to] create that on their own and do everything on their own for us and for Bowling Green [and] everybody that’s affected, is awesome.”

Stewart said App State itself had other sporting events where they encouraged people to bring donations to help out.

“I mean, just the fact that they would do that was very touching, and I know it meant a lot to a lot of people who were really appreciative of that,” Stewart said.



**JACK DOBBS**

Rick Stansbury, head coach of the WKU Hilltoppers basketball team, helps clear brush on Craig Street near WKU’s campus. Stansbury cleared debris with members of the team, who cleaned up in place of practice. “We will get more out of this than from having practice,” Stansbury said.

Not even an hour later, the WKU men’s basketball team faced off against Louisville for the first time in Diddle Arena since 2008. The game was originally supposed to be played on the CBS Sports Network, but due to COVID-19 issues canceling the Ohio State vs. Kentucky and North Carolina vs. UCLA games, WKU slipped into a nationally televised spot on CBS.

The Hilltoppers went on to dominate the Cardinals on national television to the tune of 82-72, giving them their first win against Louisville in Diddle Arena in program history, snapping a nine-game losing streak to their in-state rival in the process.

Stewart said he doesn’t think you can “put a price tag on the value of exposure” that WKU Athletics, the university and the city of Bowling Green received that day. The Hilltoppers went from one of the highest rated pre-Christmas bowl games on ESPN straight into a primetime slot on CBS.

“To my knowledge, we hadn’t been on CBS, with the exception of the NCAA Tournament, in a long time,”

Stewart said. “So to have six continuous hours of that, to win both the games, both of which were huge wins, it was really just an incredible time for all of us.”

A few days later, WKU Basketball was granted another nationally televised game due to a COVID-19 issue within Louisville’s program, this time against the Kentucky Wildcats. The Hilltoppers got within four points of the lead in the second half before the Wildcats took off to win 95-60. For both in-state games, Kentucky and Louisville pitched in to help out their fellow bluegrass school.

“Louisville’s men’s basketball team did something similar [to App State] when we played them, and the night before the game, their players actually unloaded their bus and put items on a truck,” Stewart said. “The University of Kentucky did a telethon and raised money, not just for Bowling Green, but for the whole state. That has been really the inspiring part of this, just the way that people have stepped up and wanted to help in whatever way

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

that they can.”

WKU Athletics won six consecutive games after the tornado before the Kentucky loss. The women’s basketball program is 5-0 in that time frame while WKU as a whole is 10-2 since that fateful day. Both basketball programs have yet to lose in Diddle Arena since Dec. 11.

The two programs went out a few days after the tornado to help out along with WKU Volleyball head coach Travis Hudson and his players. Men’s basketball head coach Rick Stansbury said he canceled practice because “there are more valuable things than practicing”.

“We get a lot more from it than some togetherness,” Stansbury said. “Our guys being out there in this community, understanding whatever bumps and bruises or bad things they think they got going on in their lives that’s bad, those are not problems. These are real problems here.”

“They have an opportunity to give back some,” Stansbury continued. “You’ll be a giver, help some other people. There was no question. It was something that everybody needs at

times. It puts things in perspective.”

WKU guard Luke Frampton said it was a time for the team to bond and give back to a community that has given the basketball program so much.

“We’re out there working hard and cleaning up the best we can to help the people that support us throughout the year,” Frampton said. “So, going out and meeting the community and helping them in a time of need like that is a huge thing for us.”

Stewart said everybody that came out to help and support Bowling Green “validates what’s good about America,” especially an America that’s divided on multiple fronts. Stewart believes that the United States is the best country in the world because people look out for their neighbors.

“That’s what we saw. In our time of need, a tremendous amount of people, some of whom we knew and some of whom we didn’t, stepped up to try to help not only us, but to help Bowling Green,” Stewart said. “That’s really been kind of the fabric of the history of our country - those kinds of things happening.”

Stewart said once school starts

back up and athletes return to campus, you will start to see more visibility from WKU Athletics. For now, the rebuild continues.

“This is a long, hard rebuild for Bowling Green unfortunately,” Stewart said. “There’s some progress that’s been made, but there’s a long road ahead. We’ll roll up our sleeves, and

we’ll jump in there with everybody else and certainly do our part, whatever we can to help people get back on their feet and get their lives going in the right direction again.”

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**JACK DOBBS**

Jacob Hayslip, a graduate assistant with WKU’s men’s basketball team, carries debris in a neighborhood off of Normal Street in Bowling Green on Monday, Dec. 13. The team came to clean up just two days after their 71-48 victory over Ole Miss.



**JACK DOBBS**

Members of the WKU Hilltoppers basketball team were out helping cleanup efforts on Monday, Dec. 13, just two days after the deadly tornado struck Bowling Green early Saturday morning. Head coach Rick Stansbury said he cancelled practice so the team could help out.

# Recovery resources

Scan this code to view different ways  
you can contribute to recovery efforts

