**Disaster Response Update on West Virginia Flood and #FloodBucketsOfLove**

For five weeks after devastating floods ravaged West Virginia, volunteers from across the BGAV ventured to Fairlea, WV, to assist with flood relief efforts.

Based out of First Baptist Church of Fairlea, this multi-state response site was home to more than 122 BGAV volunteers. Two BGAV shower units, including one from the Blackwater Baptist Association, and the laundry unit provided showers and laundry services for more than 400 volunteers from Virginia, West Virginia, and as far away as Texas and Missouri.

Back home in Virginia, churches across the Commonwealth collected more than 200 flood buckets plus donations to package another 100 buckets.

“The generosity of our churches and our people has been outstanding,” says Aaron Lee, Disaster Response coordinator. “To see the checks, buckets, and volunteers come flowing in, and knowing how much each will mean to an affected homeowner, is a great reminder of the strength of the BGAV.”

Rebuilding efforts are beginning as cleanup projects come to a close.

“We are currently exploring a long-term rebuild partnership,” Lee says. “We will continue sending volunteers to West Virginia as long as the need exists.”

**Story Behind the Story**

On the night of February 24, Tom Brooks was in Essex County after the tornado touched down. He is a firefighter in a nearby county, and their mutual aid agreement sent help from his fire station to a community that was reeling from tornado damage. By the next afternoon, “Hollywood,” as he is affectionately known by many, had traded his turnout gear for
his gold hat, the well-known color of BGAV Disaster Response and its national partners.

Hollywood spent the next week with the team in Essex County, joining BGAV volunteers from across the state who had joined together to meet human needs and help homeowners clean up and begin to rebuild. Each evening, Hollywood returned home for the night before going back to Essex in the morning.

But on that Monday, before the sun rose, the radio rustled Hollywood from his sleep. The call came in for Hollywood’s fire station to respond to a fire at the Urbanna marina, so off he went.

This was not Hollywood’s first callout with BGAV Disaster Response, nor is it his most recent. Last summer, he joined the response to Abbs Valley, VA, helping residents clean after heavy rainfall flooded the community. In October, he joined Joe Prince, Cliff Dehart, and a team in South Carolina following the record-setting rainstorm.

More recently, Hollywood, Joe, and Cliff responded to the June flooding in West Virginia, helping homeowner Phyllis Merritt with the cleanup of her home.

“Volunteers like Hollywood, Joe, and Cliff are the lifeblood of what we do,” says Aaron Lee. “No matter what we do, we have great volunteers who are passionate about being the best we can be as BGAV Disaster Response.”

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