

Gaylord Strong



By Paul Beachnau

I often comment it is the people in our community that make Gaylord stand out as a top travel destination. That point was emphasized by the way our citizens came together following the tornado on May 20.

While inflicting devastating losses on so many, this incident also showed what a difference people make when they come together. Immediately following the tornado, our hotels opened their doors to those who were displaced and people came to one another's aid. Neighbors, friends and strangers worked

side by side, often with little or no guidance, assisting with clean up and starting to repair the damage. It was a moving sight to see our residents supporting one another so unselfishly.

As I've mentioned before, the Tourism Bureau forms relationships with media agencies to help promote our beautiful area. Following the tornado, these relationships shifted gears as our media partners reached out for information on what was happening in Gaylord and what help was needed. In just a 24-hour period, I provided 10 live TV/radio interviews and even took Neil Rubin from the Detroit Free Press to some of the most affected areas. While he witnessed the destructive strength of nature, he was also moved by the way our community concentrated on helping one another.

As the week went on, the focus shifted from the tragedy of the tornado to how the citizens of Gaylord rallied together. Interviewers shared contact information to volunteer or make donations to the Otsego County United Way and Community Foundation, but they also shined a spotlight on the way our residents came to one another's aid.

For many guests to the area, Gaylord is a home away from home. Following the tornado's media coverage, our office received countless calls from visitors asking how they could help. Some sent donations to accepting agencies and others plan to bring needed items with them when they visit later in the summer. The kindness of strangers near and far has been seen in many ways.

Gaylord will be in the healing process for some time and it's vital that our economy stays strong. Fostering a healthy local travel industry will strengthen our community, helping the affected rebuild and allowing others to make financial donations or provide needed support. We will continue to get the message out that while the tornado made an impact that will be felt for some time, Gaylord is "open" and ready to welcome travelers. Our hotels, golf courses, restaurants, retailers, lakes and trails are still here for guests to enjoy.

I have always said Gaylord is not only the best place to visit, but also to live. Our sense of community has never been stronger or more recognized than it is now, and I couldn't be more proud to call this my home.