

# Citizen-Driven Recovery

...I got a sick, almost panicked feeling as we looked around.

DHS award honors civic leader Jane Cage and the people of Joplin for their efforts to create a vision for the city's future after the devastation of the May 2011 tornado.

On the morning after the strike of a massive EF-5 tornado, Jane Cage of Joplin, Missouri, helped clear debris and board up windows at a friend's house. Then they headed to another side of town to help church members who had a downed tree blocking their garage door.

"When we headed in that direction, I got my first real look at the incredible devastation," Ms. Cage said. "I will never forget driving down Joplin Street in the pouring rain with debris everywhere I looked. By the time we got close to the high school where the couple lived, we started to get lost. I got a sick, almost panicked feeling as we looked around."

participant in civic affairs, had volunteered to help after disasters in other cities. “I never thought that I could leave my house and drive 10 minutes and be in the same situation. It never occurred to me, that I could ever help here, where I live—ever.”

Like most people in Joplin, she spent the ensuing weeks responding to the disaster. With her own home and business intact, she helped friends salvage items from their homes and move debris to the curb. Ms. Cage then turned her attention from response to recovery. Within a few weeks, she stepped forth to lead the Citizens Advisory Recovery Team (CART), a group that would gather the full spectrum of residents to decide what Joplin would become.

The tornado of May 22, 2011, left 161 people dead and approximately 1,000 others injured...

Jane Cage, Chair of the Citizens Advisory Recovery Team. Ed Peaco/For Inside Homeland Security

The tornado of May 22, 2011, left 161 people dead and approximately 1,000 others injured in its west-to-east path across the city south of downtown, damaging or destroying roughly 7,500 houses and displacing more than 9,000 people. Among the buildings destroyed were the public high school, a Walmart, a Home Depot, a Cummins Warehouse, and one of the city’s two major hospitals—St. John’s Regional Medical Center, for which Ms. Cage had once served as Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Ms. Cage, COO of Heartland Technology Solutions in Joplin and an active

For the groundswell of citizen response that led to a comprehensive redevelopment plan, Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano in December 2012 honored Ms. Cage and the people of Joplin with the first Rick Rescorla National Award for Resilience. The honor recognizes leadership in preparation, response, and recovery in the face of disasters, and it commemorates Rescorla’s work on 9/11. He led an evacuation of 2,700 Morgan Stanley employees from the South Tower of the World Trade Center, saving the lives of many of his co-workers but losing his own.

In an interview with *Inside Homeland Security*, Ms. Cage discussed the ongoing recovery process in terms of engagement, process, progress, and patience.

### Out of disaster, an exciting opportunity

On the day after the disaster, Joplin City Manager Mark Rohr charged city planners to start preparing for the redevelopment of the city. Steve Castaner of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), who arrived one week after the tornado, encouraged local officials to form a citizen’s group to create a vision for the city. Together the officials chose as a guide

FEMA’s Emergency Support Function 14 (ESF-14), which falls under Castaner’s purview in the Long Term Community Recovery Group (LTCR), which he heads.

“FEMA tries to lead by nudging from the rear rather than pulling you forward,” Ms. Cage said. “They want citizens to take the lead in recovery.”

In a separate interview, Castaner said FEMA tries to inform a community about their options and opportunities for disaster recovery. Such resources include the support and experience of FEMA, assistance from other government agencies, and the perspectives from other communities that have encountered similar trauma and loss.

“Sometimes you can find opportunities in something catastrophic and find ways of using disaster to move a community forward and address those issues for the better,” Castaner said. “That honors some of those losses in disasters by taking those opportunities and making the community better for the future.”

City officials recognized that for residents to accept a redevelopment plan, it had to come from the community, particularly in one characterized by a healthy skepticism toward government, said Troy Bolander, Manager of Planning and Community Development.

“We truly wanted it to be a citizen-driven process. In fact, you won’t find any city representatives as chair or members of the executive committee,” Bolander said. “To have buy-in for a plan, we knew it had to be a citizen plan, not the city’s plan.”

The plan would be bold and far-reaching. The city had become a blank slate upon which a new vision could be realized.

### Beyond response: recovery

One way to express the phases of emergency management would be mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. In this model, it’s easy to miss distinctions between response and recovery, and to limit the scope of recovery, Ms. Cage said. Response is about immediate needs, and recovery calls for a plan for many years into the future, she said.

“For so many people, recovery is just those first few months when suddenly the stop lights are all back up, and everyone has



Troy Bolander, Joplin Manager of Planning and Community Development. Photo provided by City of Joplin

water, and there's electricity that runs all the way across town, and cable is restored," she said. "But that's really not recovery. It certainly is the immediate response, but there's a lot more to recovery."

Castaner gave her a "self-help guide" for proceeding with ESF-14, titled the *Long-Term Community Recovery Toolbox*, a manual of 80+ pages for recovering from a disaster. The guide outlines how it can help a community manage its recovery:

- Articulate a post-disaster community vision.
- Identify disaster-related projects to achieve the vision.
- Identify opportunities that become possible through recovery.
- Facilitate partnerships to coordinate and optimize resources.

The manual prescribes a process for recovery in five stages:

- Assessment
- Vision
- Goals
- Projects
- Implementation

The *Toolbox* includes a "decision-making tool" that helps in developing projects by identifying ideas, ongoing efforts, and gaps where work can be done. Ms. Cage said the manual helped her more fully understand the value of FEMA's presence in Joplin:

"For the people that [disaster] happens to, it's the first time for them, ever. For FEMA, it's another experience. And even though they'll tell you that all disasters are local, there are some similarities that you

can pull, in terms of recovery. So once FEMA worked with me and I read that self-help guide, I understood the process that we were supposed to follow. It gave me a framework to work from, and once we had the framework, it was a lot easier to make progress."

From the beginning of the CART's work, Ms. Cage encouraged citizens to take the long-term view of recovery. They responded with ideas that ranged from storm shelters and buried utilities to greenways and neighborhood villages. The CART proceeded with no budget and no staff. However, FEMA personnel provided guidance and administrative support. The process unfolded in three community meetings in summer and autumn of 2011:

**July 12:** Approximately 350 people came out to brainstorm needs and vision, jotting ideas on more than 1,000 sticky notes that were compiled into a 50-page PDF.

**August 16:** Citizens made recommendations about recovery priorities. The ideas on the sticky notes were organized into five categories:

- economic development
- schools and community facilities
- housing and neighborhoods
- infrastructure and environment
- post-disaster community vision

FEMA personnel devised five stations, one for each category, with ideas displayed on boards. Participants indicated their preferences by placing colored dots next to ideas they supported. The prevailing ideas were

organized in a 14-page booklet, and CART board members divided into committees dedicated to the first four categories above.

"As soon as we started to develop some themes, a lot of people wanted to hop right to the action item. FEMA said we needed to develop a vision statement first," Ms. Cage said. She asked CART colleagues for input and worked with an LTCR official to craft a vision. The CART issued the statement in early September:

Joplin will set the standard for disaster recovery by its can-do attitude. We will be recognized as a city that encourages green alternatives and healthy lifestyles. Through faith and hard work, we will be known for our vibrant business community, our commitment to innovative education and neighborhoods that meet the needs of all our citizens.

The vision statement turned out to be an essential piece of the redevelopment effort, the bellwether by which the community can measure progress, Ms. Cage said.

Later in September, CART sector group members met at a workshop led by LTCR to envision projects that could act as a catalyst for recovery. As part of the analysis, members had to consider what resources were available to meet a certain need or goal, and determine whether some system was already fulfilling that function. This "decision tool" was one of the more difficult parts of the process to think through, Ms. Cage said.

**October 13-14:** A team of 60 architects, landscape designers and other planning professionals visited Joplin for a design charrette—a community enterprise to translate the ideas into visual forms. Having read the second CART booklet, they toured the city to gain a better understanding of the redevelopment effort, and then they sketched. The team emphasized avoiding sprawl, promoting sustainability, and coordinating the city's sectors.

At the end of the first day, they invited residents to look at the plans, and the professionals revised their work in light of the feedback.

We invited federal, state, local agencies to come to Joplin and sit in the room together at once.

“Between the first day and the second day, the concepts changed as they listened to what people said. Main Street took over a larger role in redevelopment. It was interesting to watch that happen as they listened,” Ms. Cage said.

Projects emerged from the charrette, and, in November, the CART submitted a report with recommendations to the Joplin City Council. In January 2012, the Joplin City Council, along with the Joplin School Board, the Joplin Chamber of Commerce Board, the CART Board, and the Board of Aldermen of the adjacent city of Duquesne, approved *Listening to Joplin*, an implementation plan for next steps, calling for building more resilient schools, strengthening standards for home construction, and creating shared storm shelters. The city began to execute the plan, setting development standards for major corridors in March, approving a master plan and hiring a master developer in July 2012.

### Why the CART worked

Ms. Cage identified several ways that the CART can be a model for other cities. First, getting input from all sectors of the community enhanced the credibility of the process. Beyond scheduling public meetings, people from the CART talked to students at Missouri Southern State University in Joplin and visited people living in temporary housing units. “We needed to hear from everybody, not just people who were interested in civic activities,” she said.

In addition, earning the support of all groups was essential throughout the process. Setting the CART apart from the city administration helped encourage citizens to participate, and the unified front of all stakeholders before the City Council

## Planning for recovery before a disaster hits

While the people of Joplin were working on their vision of recovery, FEMA was preparing to roll out a new guide for helping states and local governments recover from disasters. Among its functions, the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) encourages communities to engage in planning and capacity building so that leaders can make plans before a disaster happens. The program helps communities make connections with people and resources among federal agencies, and it emphasizes that all members of the community should be involved in emergency management.

Jane Cage participated in the FEMA Region VII rollout of the NDRF in June 2012. In a FEMA video from that event, she said that the NDRF would accelerate the recovery process by helping communities facing disaster start recovery earlier.

The Joplin community and FEMA officials used NDRF concepts during the city’s recovery by regularly discussing how other federal agencies could help in the effort, she said. The concepts were at work as the CART prepared to issue its recommendations in January 2012. The day before presenting the plan, the CART held a recovery forum.

“We invited federal, state, local agencies to come to Joplin and sit in the room together at once. Steve [Castaner] helped do the orchestration on this piece. Then the CART presented, and all the agencies listened to figure out how they might be able to help. That was maybe one of the best examples of how the NDRF maybe worked for us — after the fact.”

— Ed Peaco for *Inside Homeland Security*



in January 2012 enhanced the plan's authority. "It was important, that night, for every group to stand together and say, 'We agree that these ideas become the basis for recovery,'" she said. "Because it sent a strong message out to everybody that we all agreed on the starting point."

Furthermore, Ms. Cage, as the Chair, had no vested interest in any aspect of the process. Although she had been active in civic affairs for many years, she happened not to have any commitments at the time the tornado hit.



**We may have our ideas on how things should redevelop or recover, but you don't truly know until you get that direction from your citizens.**

Operationally, the CART was able to bring together various entities to help leaders, who were highly stressed and working exhaustively on response efforts, to understand how others were working. While these leaders were running fast in their own separate lanes, CART meetings allowed them to look side to side, Ms. Cage said.

The nature of the CART was to be inclusive. Without a budget, it could entertain any and all ideas, regardless of expense. "Our job wasn't to put a dollar amount on anything," she said. "Our job was just to dream what it could be, and then work from there." However, not all ideas reached the report. For example, safe rooms in schools became part of the plan, but a proposal to bury utility lines was left out due to the prohibitive expense. Ms. Cage acknowledged that implementing the recovery projects entails tough spending decisions, requiring leaders to put the good of the citizens ahead of any individual entity.

The CART's independence has been crucial, she said:

"I think CART answers to the citizens. I don't think it answers to the city manager or to the Chamber or to FEMA. It's an independent organization that's loosely held—with no bylaws, no budget, no staff. It's just a group of us that have gotten together—and probably the fact that sometimes I'm strong-willed and stubborn



(laughs) has made the process continue."

Bolander, the Manager of Planning and Community Development, said it was tough for the city to let go of control of the process. "We may have our ideas on how things should redevelop or recover, but you don't truly know until you get that direction from your citizens," he said. "It had to be their plan. Jane's right, it's the representation of the citizens."

### **Personal aptitude**

Ms. Cage demonstrated an ability to build relationships within and beyond the community and to motivate people to be a part of Joplin's future, Castaner said. "I saw how she was motivational to other federal agencies, myself and my team included," he said.

In the weeks after the tornado, Ms. Cage traveled to a meeting of a technology industry group of which she was a board member. At that meeting, she gave an update on the disaster, and the group made a donation to Joplin schools. When she took the chair of the CART, she made personal

connections with citizens and officials.

"I saw that she could motivate people to be involved, to care about what was going on and to share their views. She reached out with her voice, with her heart, and got people to the table," Castaner said. When people saw that she was sincere about what she wanted to accomplish for the community, they wanted to be a part of that as well, he said.

"It was really touching to see when we had a public meeting, and she knew somebody who lost their house was actually at the meeting, making contributions to the community as a whole," Castaner said. "That really touched her personally. And so she reached out back to them and kept them involved and hopeful in the situation."

Several factors other than her leadership skills as a COO made her a worthwhile candidate to lead the CART, Ms. Cage said. She had participated in church mission trips to help people recover from the 2007 Greensburg, Kansas, tornado and the 2008 flood of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The work was satisfying, she said—living





(Top Left) A new hospital is taking shape to replace St. John's Regional Medical Center, which was destroyed in the May 22, 2011, tornado. Ed Peaco/For Inside Homeland Security

(Bottom Left) Two churches are rebuilding in an area that was hard hit by the May 22, 2011, tornado. Ed Peaco/For Inside Homeland Security

(Right) Rebuilding of housing proceeds in the area of Joplin that was hardest hit by the May 22, 2011, tornado. Ed Peaco/For Inside Homeland Security

in camps and helping people one-on-one.

More important was the fact that she did not feel the disaster's impact directly; her home and her business were not harmed. Without response and recovery responsibilities of her own, she could step up to this civic role—unlike city, school, and utility officials, all of whom were working under pressure to respond to the disaster. Additionally, Ms. Cage has been a widow for many years and has no children:

"I don't have competing family demands that a lot of people have, so it gave me more time to do this kind of work. Nobody would bother me as I worked on the couch at night and say, 'When are you going to quit working on that and come to bed?'"

"The other part of it is, I love being at home, and I love my house. When I walk in, it's the nicest sanctuary I know. ... When I think about all the people I know who lost their house, I think about how hard that would be for me to have lost the most special place I go. It would have been devastating. It's another thing that makes me work hard."

### About the DHS honor

Ms. Cage said she has often reflected on the heroism of Rick Rescorla and wondered how "facilitating a lot of meetings" was sufficient to qualify her for the honor. She has spoken several times with his widow, Susan Rescorla.

"I wanted to touch base with her to tell her what an honor it was to even be associated with anything with his name on it, that I understood what a hero he really was," Ms. Cage said.

When Secretary Napolitano called her in December, Ms. Cage learned a little about why she was chosen along with the people of Joplin. Secretary Napolitano said she hoped that Joplin's story of recovery and resilience might inspire the people along the East Coast who had been devastated by Hurricane Sandy in October, Ms. Cage related.

"All this work has been a big privilege. I've found work way above my pay grade many times," she said. "I've been really lucky in that respect to do really interesting work that makes a difference."

For more information on being prepared for all possible man-made and natural disaster incidents, consider becoming **CERTIFIED IN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS, CDP-I®**. Contact member services at **877.219.2519** to learn more now!