

It seems like everyone had something to contribute when tornadoes roared through parts of Pekin and Borden last year. Friends, neighbors and even people from outside southern Indiana stepped up to offer relief and support in the form of meals, money or simply a (quite literal) helping hand.

But some people offered their more unique services during the aftermath of the storms. Local resident Lora Nale was one of them.

Nale has a passion for quilting, and it was in this way that she chose to contribute during the weeks and months that followed the March 2, 2012 tornadoes. She says the idea first started to gain momentum while she was leading one of her occasional quilting retreats. "That's where I first asked for donations," Nale explained. Her retreat, 'The Quilt Away Get Away', is just one of the programs she offers as part of her quilting services. Its a day, or sometimes overnight, retreat usually held at the Quilt Corner Retreat Center located at Clifty Falls.

"The response was huge," Nale continued, recalling the vast quantities of fabric she began to receive after making the initial pitch at the retreat. "It almost completely covered that wall," she said, pointing to a long section of wall inside her tall garage, which became her center of operations when the quilting began. Many of the donations came from local quilt shops. She said the response from willing volunteers who wanted to help her sew was equally incredible.

Their purpose was simple, yet challenging – Nale wanted every family that was hit by the tornadoes to have a handmade quilt, free of charge. "She made over 120 quilts," according to Nale's sister, Rhonda Bennett, who helped to coordinate the whole process. "There was only one family we could never find."

Nearly a year later, the crisis may be over but the charity continues to be woven in spades.

Take a weekend drive down some of the quiet, wooded roads on the outskirts of Borden, and you might catch a brief glimpse of sewers hard at work in a three-door garage as you pass by. Nale, Bennett, and several dedicated volunteers continue meeting together to sew quilts for those in need. The organization is now called "Charity Quilts", but aside from being given an official name, nothing much has changed in the way Nale and her fellow volunteers operate.

"We try to meet once or twice a month now," Nale says. They no longer quilt specifically for tornado victims, instead reaching out to any individual or group in need who could use a beautiful, old-fashion quilt. Bennett added that each quilt that's been created over the past year has borne the label "Quilts because we care." For Bennett and her sister, its more than a catchy slogan, its become embedded into the very fabric of their lives.

Nale says the experience of helping her neighbors and friends in the wake of tornado damage has shown her what significance can be found in a relatively small, but kind act. "These people lost everything, including old quilts and heirlooms...to them a simple, homemade quilt means a lot."

In addition to running Charity Quilts, Nale continues to hold quilting retreats, as well as quilt, scrapbook and craft classes. And she always welcomes new information about residents who could use a Charity Quilts or fellow quilters who are interested in volunteering their services for the cause.

You can contact Nale for more information on any of these activities by calling 812-967-2075, or emailing her at lorajn@mymail.coop.