

Guess what showed up at the Mid-America Science Park in Scottsburg on Thursday afternoon, March 15?

A small caravan of a straight van and a semi-tractor-trailer along with a couple of other vehicles bearing staff and officials of Vigo County Schools and Staples, the national office supply company, beeped their horns as they arrived after a three-hour trip from Terre Haute.

Daniel Tanoos, Vigo County Superintendent of Schools, and one special teacher, Matt Renn, a Henryville graduate, were among the crew that helped people at the Scottsburg Disaster Relief Center unload all those supplies for Henryville students and staff.

Out came a mountain of paper products, pens and pencils, erasers, coffee makers, notebooks, backpacks, microwave ovens, oh, you name it and it was in there somewhere. All was either donated by Staples, which has a major distribution center in Terre Haute, or collected by Vigo County students to help students from Henryville settle into their new homes.

Junior and senior high kids will be attending classes at the MAS Park in Scottsburg. Elementary children will be going to the old Graceland Christian Academy building for their classes. Though school was to have already started for younger students, all Henryville students will probably now go back starting April 2 to finish their interrupted school year.

The interruption - two twisters that tore through the heart of Henryville and then danced across the countryside to the Nabb-Chelsea-Marysville area - struck the cafeteria side of the school first. About 60% of the school was heavily damaged or destroyed. An Atlanta-based firm, Belfor Property Restoration, is not only tackling the repair and restoration of that West Clark Community school complex but also has the task of transforming the MAS Park's incubator area for new businesses into a temporary home for the junior and senior high students.

Heartwarming as local efforts have been to help Henryville, the Vigo County effort was, well, the cherry on top of the sundae, a real, rare treat.

Hearing about the storms' effects on Henryville, Dr. Tanoos said he immediately began thinking about what to do to help. "Staples has partnered with our school district of 16,000 students for several projects. Of course, I thought of them, and, let me tell you, there was no hesitation. What I got when I called was a 'We're in!' " Tanoos related.

Renn played sports at Henryville High School. He naturally was worried about his home community and old friends and family members who suffered losses on March 2. The campaign to help with school supplies came naturally as well. Vigo County students not only packed backpacks with school supplies but also raised about \$1,700 in cash.

"We've taught our students to be good community servants. This is a good example for them to follow," advised Dr. Tanoos.

The most emotional part of the group's journey to Scottsburg on that Thursday had nothing to do with the school supplies, though. The Superintendent and several others, including Renn, went to Henryville to see for themselves what an EF4 tornado can do in a matter of minutes.

"Oh, my gosh. We just could not imagine what those folks went through and what they are feeling now. And the kids, it's unbelievable that everyone got out of that school building and those buses alive. Thank God, thank God," Tanoos reflected. "I still think about it."

Henryville is now a community under siege, but that's a good thing.

On Saturday, March 17, the air reverberated with the inevitable whine of chainsaws. But the noise was accompanied by the pound, pound, pound of hammers.

Several homes were getting new roofs, losing those bright blue tarps that hopefully kept much

of the rain that fell last week out.

Some dwellings sported new doors and windows. A house that had apparently not yet been touched was boarded up, but someone had written in black spray paint a huge "God Bless" on the piece of wood over its front door.

Across where a nice home had once nestled against a gentle slope north of State Road 160, about 200 volunteers in bright orange t-shirts with Samaritan's Purse were picking up the bits and pieces of plastic, wood scraps, metal and the like as a small front-end bulldozer worked to push the trash into a huge pile. Advised one man, "We've come from all over to help in the name of Jesus Christ." One member of the crew was from California, he said. Others were from as close as Louisville, Ky.

The site of the Marathon gas station is pretty clear now. It has a cheerful sign that announces the store will be rebuilt soon. Construction crews - and their pickup trucks - were everywhere. Down at St. Francis, the pretty Catholic church at the corner of the S.R. 160 and U.S. Highway 31, space was at a premium as many folks were giving out supplies or doling out free food. Members of a Cincinnati, Ohio, church drove around distributing donuts and beverages. The Joplin, Mo., group was still there as they have been since the first week of the reclamation, still intent on helping Henryville as others helped them after their tornado about eight months ago.

Over 100 tons of debris have been taken to the Clark County landfill since clean-up efforts began.

What struck this reporter the most was the naked look of what had been wooded hills and lawns. A lot of damaged trees have been removed.

Could it be possible that some group or a whole group of organizations might want to help reforest the community? Give them back their trees, which will grow as Henryville will in coming years.

Just a thought.

Of course, there are far more important tasks ahead for everyone. For the Disaster Relief Center in Scottsburg, it's keeping the desk there staffed for the next three months so that donations of any kind can be quickly accepted and added to the inventory, and then assigned to whatever area needs aid the most. Yes, the center will be open that long.

People need to be encouraged to continue giving because, once the media's spotlight flickers away from Henryville and Marysville, donations will slow more than they have in the past week or so.

But the need will still be there. "We won't refuse any donation," advised Scottsburg Mayor Bill Graham, talking about the Relief Center. "Everything is going to help, and the need will be present for a long, long time."