

Accel Group's Cedar Rapids quarters damaged

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That's what the 2020 derecho did on Aug. 10, wreaking havoc south of U.S. Highway 20 just after the noon hour, stretching from southeastern South Dakota to western Ohio, a territory of over 770 miles in which the storm unleashed its fury, with winds up to 112 mph, causing incalculable damage.

As Cassie and her co-workers watched the devastation outside, they turned to action to mitigate the damage as fast as they could while the storm raged. They pushed laptops and family photos out of harm's way and huddled in the office until they started smelling gas coming from the lines in the parking lot.

At this point they ran to the parking lot, carpooled in vehicles that had been spared by the brunt of the storm, and headed out to the Hy-Vee parking lot nearby. They were grateful that by that time, the the rain had subsided.

Eventually, Cassie got home where another picture of destruction awaited her.

"It was a nightmare to pull into," she said.

The house roof had been ripped off, especially over the master bedroom. Without further ado, she started helping her husband and kids, who had just emerged out of their safe space under the staircase. As a team, put in buckets and plastic containers to stem the damage from the water from permeating into the floors.

It was hectic, so Cassie lost her sense of time. Her three daughters, aged 8, 4, and 1, were understandably scared and distraught, especially after they saw the neighborhood. They had been in the safe space in the house in prior storms, but had never really seen anything like that.

"Everyone was safe so that was the best part," she said with audible relief.

The houses around them looked in similar shape, so Cassie and her family offered whatever comfort and help they could to their neighbors.

Meanwhile, after sending her daughters to her parents' house, Cassie shelved away her personal circumstances and started focusing on her job — to help her customers, who were all in similar situations, with their claims.

The storm had cut off the internet and cell phone services, so she could not do much to help right away.

But on Wednesday morning, she showed up at the Waverly headquarters, where she, along with other affected colleagues, could work using her laptop and a hot spot, and help her clients with their predicament.

Thankfully, the agency's offices

in Des Moines and Coralville were not damaged.

The last derecho that ripped through the state happened on July 11, 2011.

It started north of Des Moines, ripped through Vinton and Garrison, damaging the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School, among many other buildings in the area, and leaving a permanent scar on the psyche of the town.

But the 2020 Midwest derecho came on top of the coronavirus pandemic, which had already taken a toll on the social fabric of the world.

Dealing with a natural disaster in pandemic times takes stamina, said Ty Burke, a partner with The Accel Group.

"This is the most significant storm we have seen," he said.

But dealing with both and putting them aside in order to help others takes a special dedication, added his colleague, Tony Pollastrini.

Since the storm, and the partial restoration of services in the state, claims have started pouring into the insurance office at the speed of hundreds per hour.

"It's pretty sad to look at clients' damages," Cassie said. "It's everywhere."

Which brings us back to the origins of "derecho" in modern meteorology.

The term was coined in 1888 by University of Iowa professor Gustavus Hinrichs, who in 1875 became a charter member of the Iowa Academy of Science, and founded and directed the first weather service in the state that same year, according to his bio on the Storm Prediction Center, a research agency which is part of the National Weather Service (NWS) and the National Centers for Environmental Prediction.

Regardless of its strength, however, the 2020 derecho, like any natural disaster, can never crush the human spirit, which

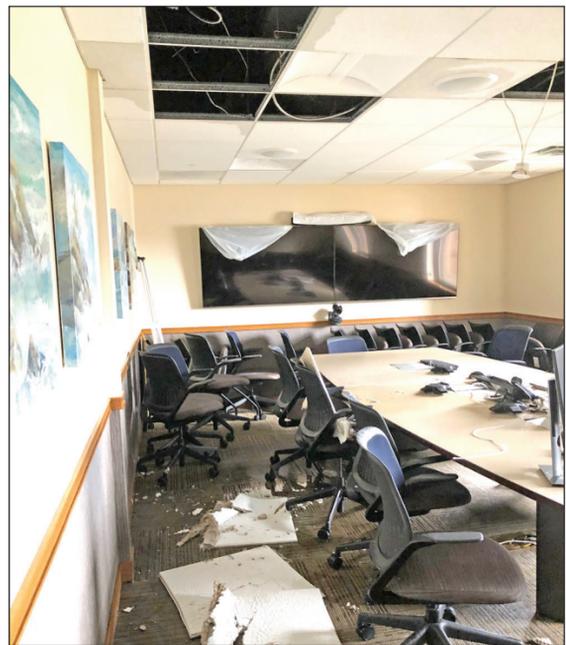
puts everyone back on their feet after nature strikes.

The storm only tests the spirit.

At The Accel Group now, the "fish bowl," a joint office with glass walls shared by Pollastrini and Burke, has now become the command center for claims processing.

And Burke, a man of faith, says that answering the call to help others in their time of need is exactly the reason why The Accel Group exists.

"For a team like ours, this will give us the ability to deliver on our promise," he said. "It is pretty cool to see the helpers who raise their hands and say let's do this together."



COURTESY PHOTOS



Above right: The derecho severely damaged the conference room of The Accel Group's Cedar Rapids location.

Above left: The "fish bowl" has become a command center for claims at The Accel Group following Monday's derecho.

Right: Jeremy Smith, from The Accel Group's Cedar Rapids office, assists a client with storm damage claims in the branch's parking lot.

Harris picked as Biden's running mate

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cial Counsel Robert Mueller about Russia.

During the early days of the 2020 campaign, Harris had challenged Biden about his resistance to public school bussing, which she said benefitted her.

Carissa Froyum, a candidate for House District 63 which includes Bremer and northern Black Hawk counties, said Harris is an extremely strong choice.

"She is an experienced attorney general and accomplished U.S. senator with the experience and temperament to lead the country," Froyum said in an email. "Iowans who got to know her during the caucus season found her to be personable, knowledge-

able, and a strong advocate for everyday Americans.

"As the daughter of immigrants, she has lived the American dream. As a prosecutor, she was extremely effective: getting convictions for violent crime, targeting fraud, and reducing crime. The choice of Harris demonstrates Biden's decision-making process: thoughtful, open, and pragmatic. He chose the best person for the job. It's also exciting to see a woman on the ballot for the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to vote in the U.S.!"

Pam Egli, candidate for Senate District 32, and Dean Mitchell, who is running for Bremer County Supervisors District 1, both declined to comment on the Harris pick. Egli is concentrating on her own race, while Mitchell deferred to Charlson's statement.

Biden and Harris were expected to make

their first campaign appearance together Wednesday afternoon in Wilmington, Delaware.

Prior to Harris, the other women who have run for vice president were Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, with former Vice President Walter Mondale, and Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin in 2008, with Sen. John McCain, while former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ran for president in 2016.

Iowa Democratic Party Chairman Mark Smith said members of his party are excited to have Harris on the ticket because she shares Biden's view of "standing up" for what they view as "the backbone of this country: working families."

"She has what it takes to help restore the soul of our nation and clean up the chaos and confusion caused by the Trump administration," Smith said in a statement.

"Kamala Harris is a trailblazer who will be ready on Day One to fight for Iowans and all Americans. As a senator and the Attorney General of California, she's stood up for working families and social justice to move our country forward. From cracking down on big banks and big oil, to standing up for marriage equality and public safety against gun violence — Kamala Harris has already proven she has the courage and tenacity required to take on the tough, important battles and win.

"Kamala Harris is the right person to stand next to Joe Biden and take on Donald Trump and Mike Pence on the campaign trail. Iowa Democrats look forward to supporting her in the coming months and voting for her as Vice President in November."

"Is Surgical Weight Loss Right for Me?"



Thursday, Aug. 20
6 to 7:30 p.m.

Presenter:
Dr. J. Matthew Glascock
General Surgery Clinic

Event will either be held in Tendrils Rooftop Garden or via Google Meet. Check our Facebook page for details.

Please register at (319) 352-8033.



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"Diabetes Prevention"

Tuesday, Aug. 18
6 to 7 p.m.

Event will either be held in Tendrils Rooftop Garden or via Google Meet. Check our Facebook page for details.

Learn how modest lifestyle changes related to nutrition and weight loss can help reduce the risk of diabetes.

WHC presenter:
Mindy Ellsworth, RDN, LD, CDCES
WHC nutrition therapy

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