



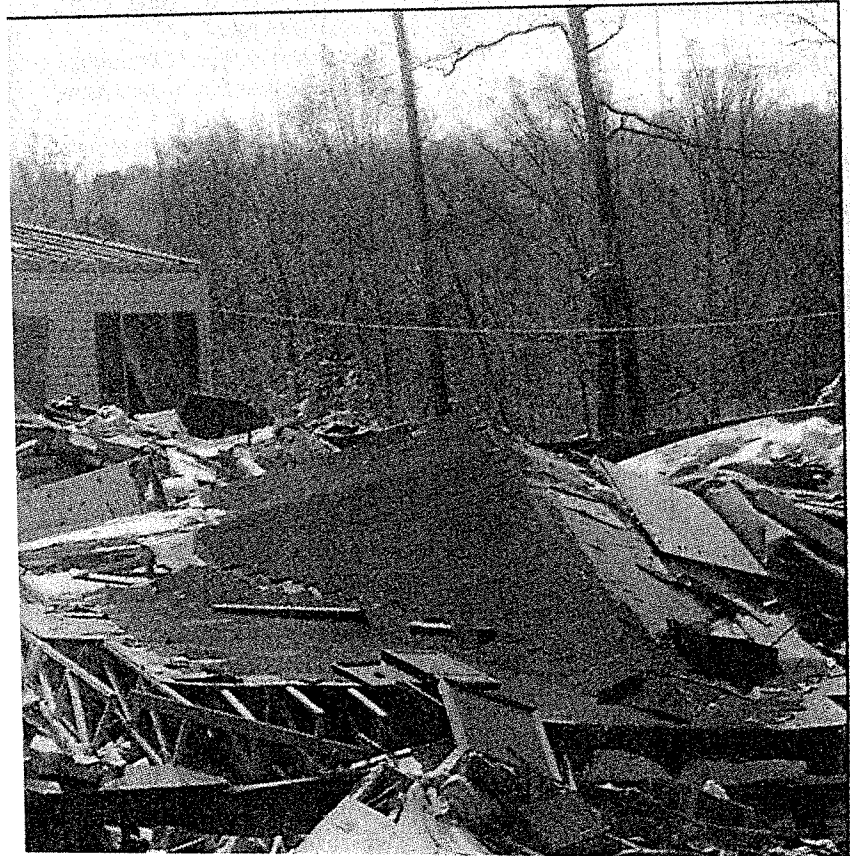
# vir VS-AEGIS

*See inside  
for more  
photos and  
stories  
about  
St. Clair  
County's  
recent  
tornado.*

Thursday, April 16, 1998

50 cents Volume 125-No. 16

## gh St. Clair County



### Bethel Baptist Church destroyed

By Kimberly Stark  
LEEDS NEWS EDITOR

Last week's devastating tornado brought together friends, neighbors, families and strangers.

In St. Clair County the devastation was not as bad as in West Jefferson County. However the complete destruction of Bethel Baptist Church in Moody caused a community to pull together and be thankful for the fact that no lives were lost at the church

The devastation also brought to town Congressman Bob Riley.

On Thursday, after visiting West Jefferson County with Vice President Al Gore, Riley visited Bethel Baptist Church. "I was in Bosnia earlier in the week," said Riley. "I thought I'd seen the worst devastation from the war there. That

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Deborah Braxton/St. Clair News-Aegis

**AFTERMATH OF TORNADO'S FURY**—Bruce Leon Skinner Jr., 29, and Rebecca McInturff Skinner, 33, were killed April 8, when their mobile home was thrown some 40 feet in the air and landed upside down in a neighbor's yard during an F2 tornado that swept through St. Clair County.

Their three children, Nicholas, Shelby and Madison, survived the ordeal. Shelby and Madison are still hospitalized with multiple injuries, but in stable condition.

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while 41 homes had been subjected to moderate to severe damage. St. Clair EMA Director Gwen Looney said damage in the area had been estimated at nearly

(See Moriah page 8A)

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## This Week April 16 - 23

# St. Clair County I

### Thursday, April 16

#### Delta Kappa Gamma Meeting

PELL CITY—The Delta Kappa Gammas will have a meeting at 3:40 p.m. at the home of Jill Abbott.

#### Meet the Candidates

SPRINGVILLE—The St. Clair County Republican Party is hosting a covered-dish supper and county and state candidate forum at the Springville National Guard Armory at 6 p.m. For more information, call Phillis Meeks at 884-3223 or chairman Mike Fricker at 525-4029.

### Saturday, April 18

#### Wheels for Life Bike-A-Thon

PELL CITY—The St. Jude Children's Research Hospital Wheels for Life Bike-A-Thon will be held at the Avondale walking track from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. The rain date is April 25. For more information, call Tammy George at 338-1014.

#### Buffet Breakfast

ARGO—"Friends of Argo" will sponsor the breakfast from 7-11 a.m. at the Argo Town Hall. All-you-can-eat is \$5, children 12 & under are \$2.50 and children under 3 are free. Proceeds go toward the purchase of a new engine for the Argo Volunteer Fire Department. For more information, call 655-4434.

#### Chicken Supper

COOK SPRINGS—The Cook Springs Volunteer Fire Department will sponsor the supper from 4-7 p.m. Adults are \$5 and children are \$3.

(See Week page 2B)

By STAN J. GRIFFIN  
St. Clair News-Aegis

PELL CITY—While the deadly storm which hammered parts of St. Clair County last Wednesday will no doubt leave behind a myriad of tragic images, perhaps one of the most positive reminders of the violent weather assault will be the performance of the St. Clair County Emergency Management Agency.

Judging from the comments of several different sources, the agency received high marks for handling a very arduous situation in exemplary fashion.

Ellen Bain, an assistant with the St. Clair EMA, said Wednesday's

storm was similar, as far as devastation in the county, to one which affected Ragland some four years ago.

"The Ragland tornado in March of 1994 had probably a little more damage," said Bain. "The difference in this storm is that we had two fatalities."

She said she was very touched by the overwhelming spirit of teamwork amidst the tragic storm.

"As far as coordination, I have never seen it work so well," said Bain. "Our instant command was set up with the Wattsville Volunteer Fire Department, and we received mutual aid from several fire departments such as Riverside, Pell

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## Red Cross and Mt. Moriah unify disaster relief effort

By HEATHER SHARP  
St. Clair News-Aegis

MT. MORIAH—Mt. Moriah Baptist Church immediately teamed up with Red Cross Thursday morning, April 9, to provide disaster relief to victims of Wednesday night's tornado.

With the help of church members, Red Cross used the church building as a site for food and clothing donations and as a referral center for those in search of temporary housing.

Hundreds of people made their way through the church the first two days after the tornado struck, according to the church's pastor, the Rev. Ronnie Venable. He said that some of those people were victims, some were volunteers and others were delivering donations.

When asked how long the church

would be open for the Red Cross, Venable replied, "Until the need is not here anymore."

He also stated that as of Tuesday, April 14, the church had received plenty of food donations and that the greatest need now is for household goods and linens.

FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) also visited the church last Friday. Even though FEMA went door-to-door to offer assistance, information was left at the church.

One FEMA member said that it was important to use the church as a central location because FEMA would not be able to reach many people due to the fact that so many homes were completely destroyed.

Food was provided for victims and volunteers. Red Cross volunteer June Stephens said, "We brought food the first day but there was so

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<p><b>PELL CITY</b> FORD-LINCOLN-MERCURY 338-9463</p> <p><i>Specials of the Week!</i></p>	<p><b>1997 TOWN CAR EXEC.</b> 12K miles, leather, all power, x-clean. New \$38,900 — Your Cost — <b>\$25,780</b></p>	<p><b>1996 MARK VIII</b> sunroof, leather, CD changer. Has it all! <b>\$19,990</b></p>	<p><b>19</b> auto, i factory</p>
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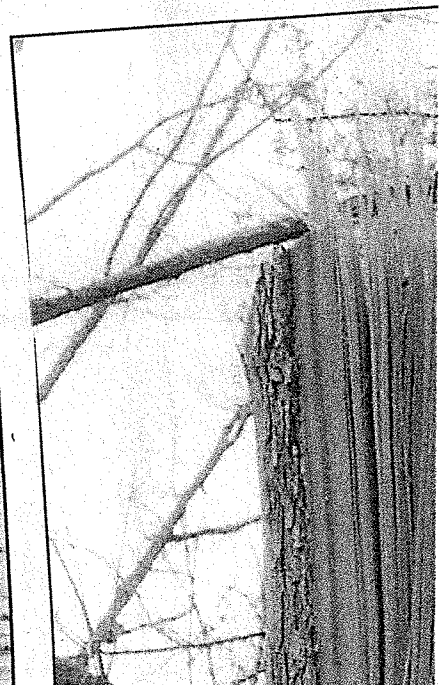
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# on St. Clair



Stan J. Griffin/News-Aegis

**THE DAY AFTER**—Fallen trees were a prevalent scene in the Mt. Moriah community last Thursday morning. A powerful tornado swept through St. Clair County last Wednesday night, causing extensive damage in Wattsville, Coal City, and in Moody.



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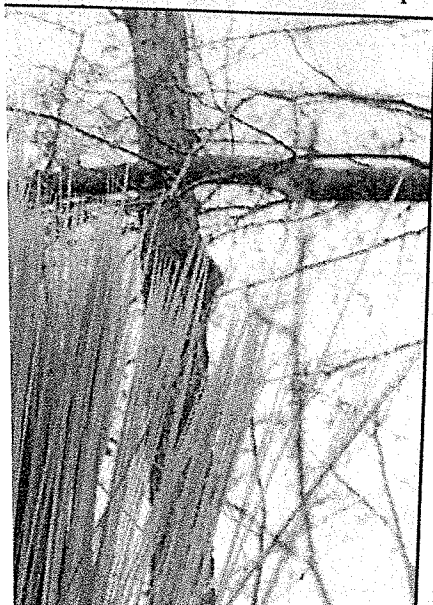


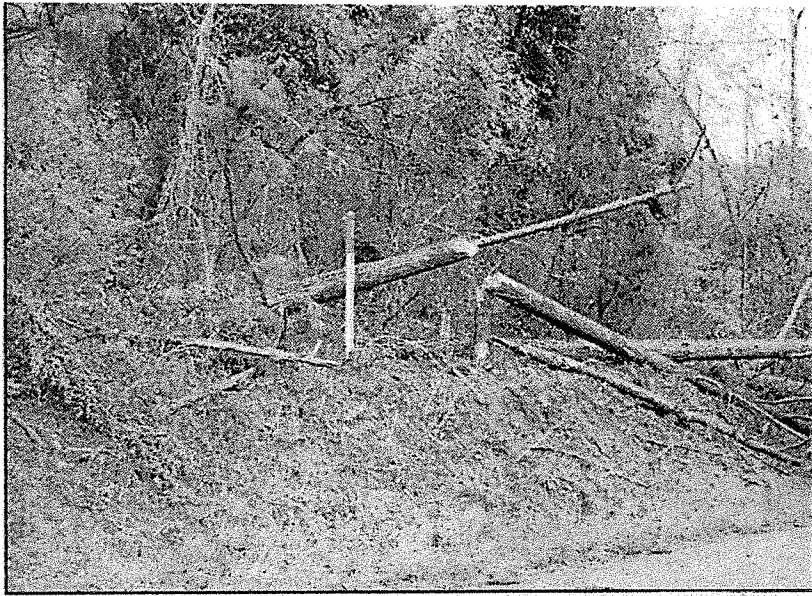
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Deborah Braxton/News-Aegis

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**ST. CLAIR MEMORIAL GARDENS LOSES STATUE**—St. Clair Memorial Gardens suffered some damage in the tornado that blew through St. Clair County April 8. The statue that has been a landmark at the cemetery since 1968 was blown off its pedestal and broken into pieces. A spokesman for the cemetery said that a new statue is already being created as its replacement.





Stan J. Griffin/News-Aegis

**SNAPPED LIKE PENCILS**—Trees snapped into like pencils give a testimony to the power of nature in Mt. Moriah as this community in St. Clair County was heavily damaged by a tornado which passed through last Wednesday night.



Erica Joiner/News-Aegis

**LENDING A HELPING HAND**—Terry Wilson of the Kilgrove Funeral Home helps to pick up debris at St. Clair Memorial Gardens on Highway 231 near Wattsville. A powerful tornado passed through St. Clair County last Wednesday night.



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**SPLINTERED REMAINS**—Shown above is a close-up of splintered trees left in the wake of the tornado that hit St. Clair County on Wednesday night, April 8.

## Disaster relief effort underway for tornado victims

CLANTON—Federal and state disaster recovery efforts accelerated quickly following President Clinton's declaration of a major disaster in Jefferson, St. Clair, and Tuscaloosa counties last Wednesday as a result of the April 8 tornadoes that ripped across central Alabama.

The relief system that was put into place just last month due to the floods and storms in South Alabama was again established to bring federal aid to tornado victims.

"The first and most important message we have for anyone who suffered losses because of the tornadoes is to please utilize that toll-free application number at 800-462-9029," said Glenn Woodard, the federal official assigned by President Clinton to coordinate the relief effort.

"No one should assume they are not eligible for disaster aid, they should call that number and let the operators interview them and determine if there's some kind of help they could apply for, regardless of their insurance situation," Woodard said.

Since the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) application hotline was opened to tornado victims in those three counties last Friday, 661 applications for various kinds of aid have been made through the end of the day Saturday.

Most of the tornado victims have applied for FEMA's housing assistance, either in the form of

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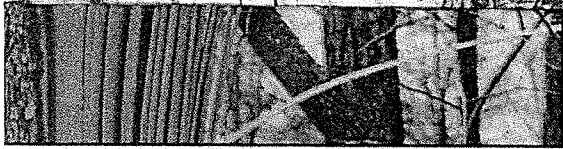
Woodard rental assist hands of the this week. FE mail out chea days after app

In addition provided to in business own authorized gr state governm of their emer during the t response to th to help pay for removal costs expenses are co paying 75 perc government or 25 percent.

Lee Helm Emergency M







Jennifer Braxton/St. Clair News-Aegis

**MAINS**—Shown above is one of the many thousands of homes in the wake of the tornado that ripped through St. Clair County Wednesday night, April 8.

## relief efforts y for tornado victims

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grants for temporary rental payments while they repair or rebuild their damaged homes, or grants for enough repairs to fix a home well enough to move back into it. Another large number of applications were made to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for low-interest loans to rebuild homes and businesses.

In major disasters, SBA lends money at special low rates and with generous repayment terms to both individuals and business owners if they qualify with the ability to repay such loans. In most disasters, SBA loans are the most-used form of federal aid that reaches people with property losses.

Woodard said the first checks for rental assistance should be in the hands of the early applicants during this week. FEMA's goal is always to mail out checks within seven to ten days after application.

In addition to the aid being provided to individuals, families, and business owners, FEMA has also authorized grants to help local and state governments recover the costs of their emergency measures taken during the early stages of the response to the tornadoes and grants to help pay for the massive debris removal costs that will accrue. These expenses are cost shared with FEMA paying 75 percent and state or local government or both sharing the other 25 percent.

Lee Helms, the Alabama Emergency Management Agency



Stan J. Griffin/News-Aegis

**CRUMPLED REMAINS**—Debris such as this was a common sight in the Mt. Moriah community in St. Clair County after a powerful tornado passed through the county last Wednesday night.

Director who Governor Fob James has named to coordinate the recovery effort with FEMA, said, "Governor James has directed all state agencies involved in the disaster recovery effort to continue doing whatever is necessary to assist the communities struck by last week's tornado."

Mr. Helms said the Alabama EMA will continue to coordinate with the Alabama National Guard to provide resources to assist with the clean-up and security measures.

The Alabama Department of Transportation, the Alabama Forestry Department and the Department of Corrections are also involved in helping local communities. Other

state agencies are also working to assist tornado victims that have specialized needs.

Last Saturday, disaster officials opened a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) in Sylvan Springs, the first of several to be opened to assist victims in getting information about assistance available and to check on their applications already made on the toll-free application hotline. Other DRCs were opened in Pratt City and Concord.

DRCs are planned to be set up to serve victims in Oak Grove and in Tuscaloosa and St. Clair counties.

The centers are not provided as a place to apply for aid since that must be done by using the free hotline.

Stan J. Griffin/News-Aegis

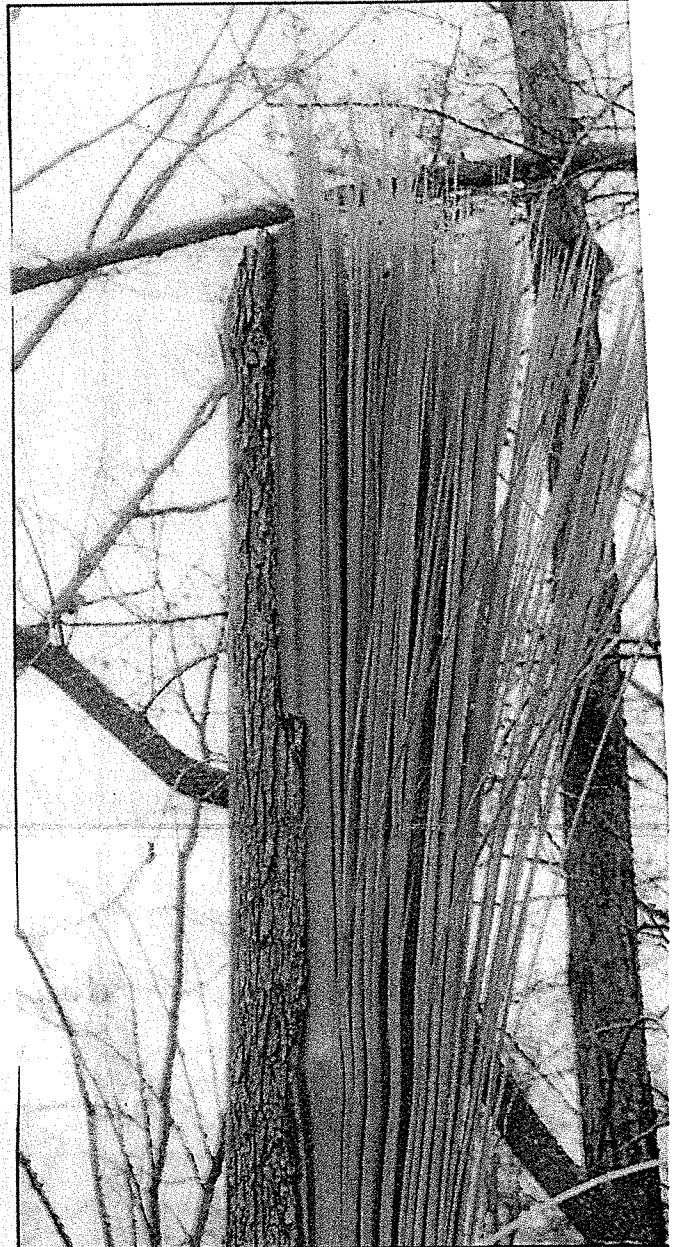
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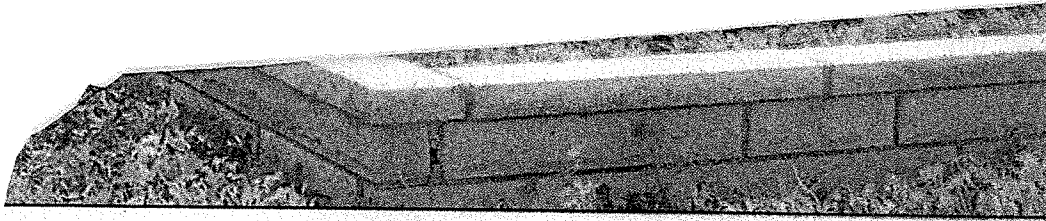
**LEFT IN ITS WAKE**—Scenes like this one have been spotted in both the Mount Moriah community and around Bethel Baptist Church in Moody. This debris is from Chapel Hill Funeral Home on Highway 231 North.



Jennifer Braxton/St.

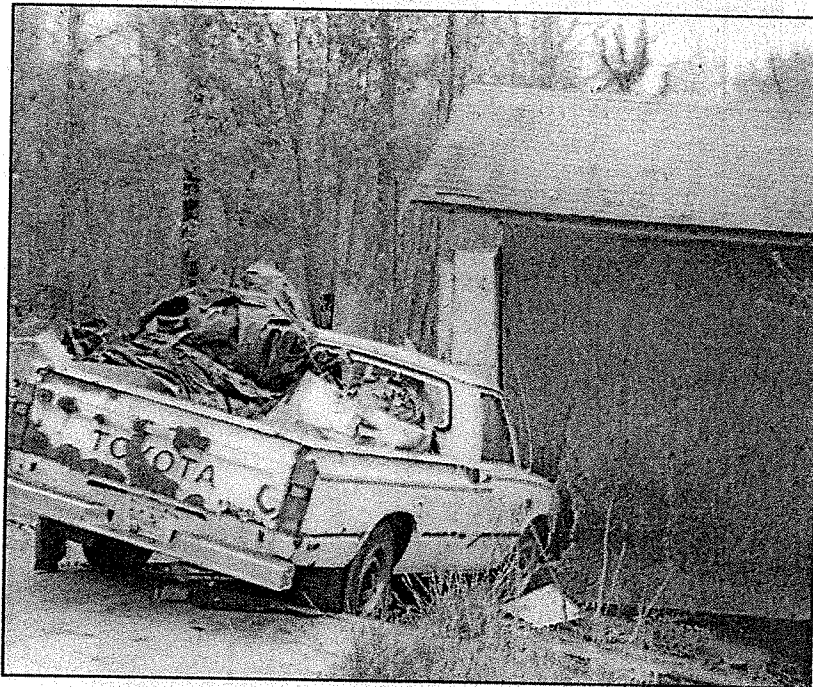
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Deborah Braxton/News-Aegis

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Stan J. Griffin/News-Aegis

**THE FORCE OF NATURE**—The power of last Wednesday's tornado which passed through St. Clair County is evident here at the Mt. Moriah Home of Jan Harris as this truck was lifted and thrown into this utility shed.



St. Clair News-Aegis

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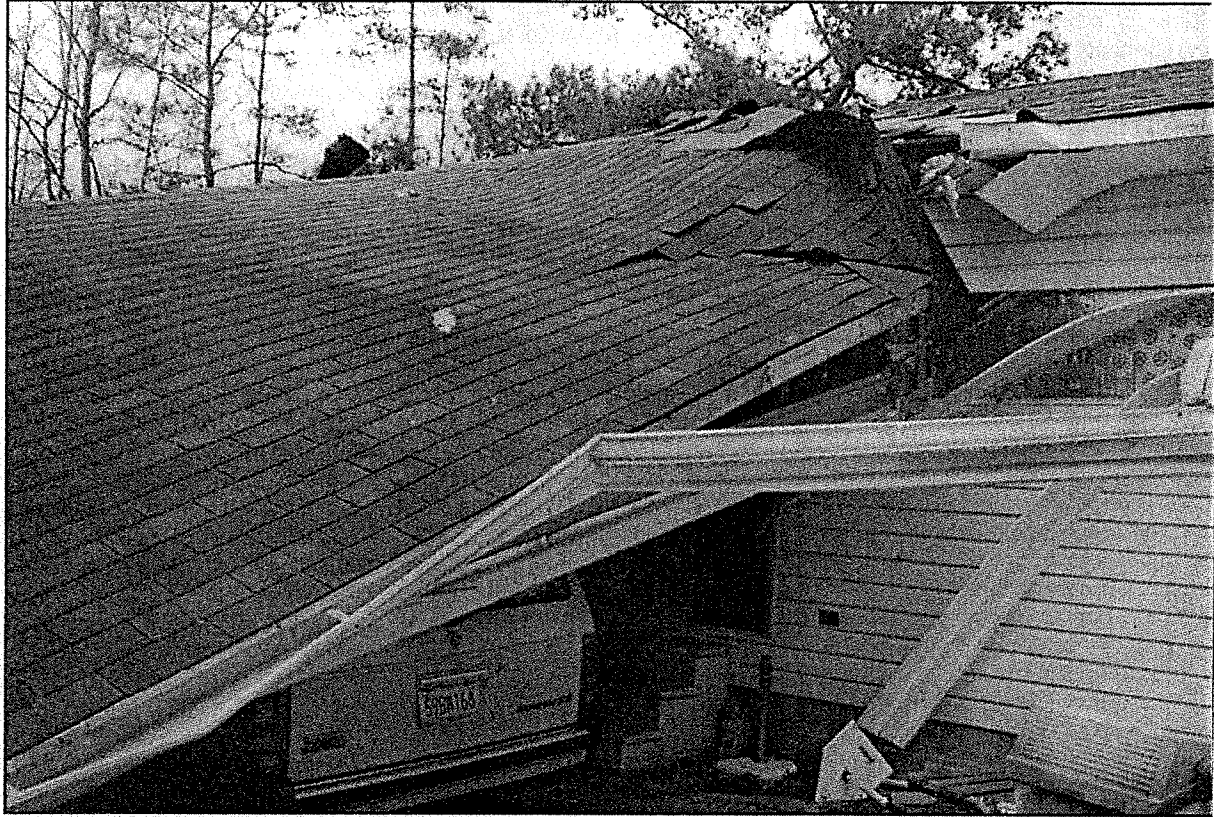
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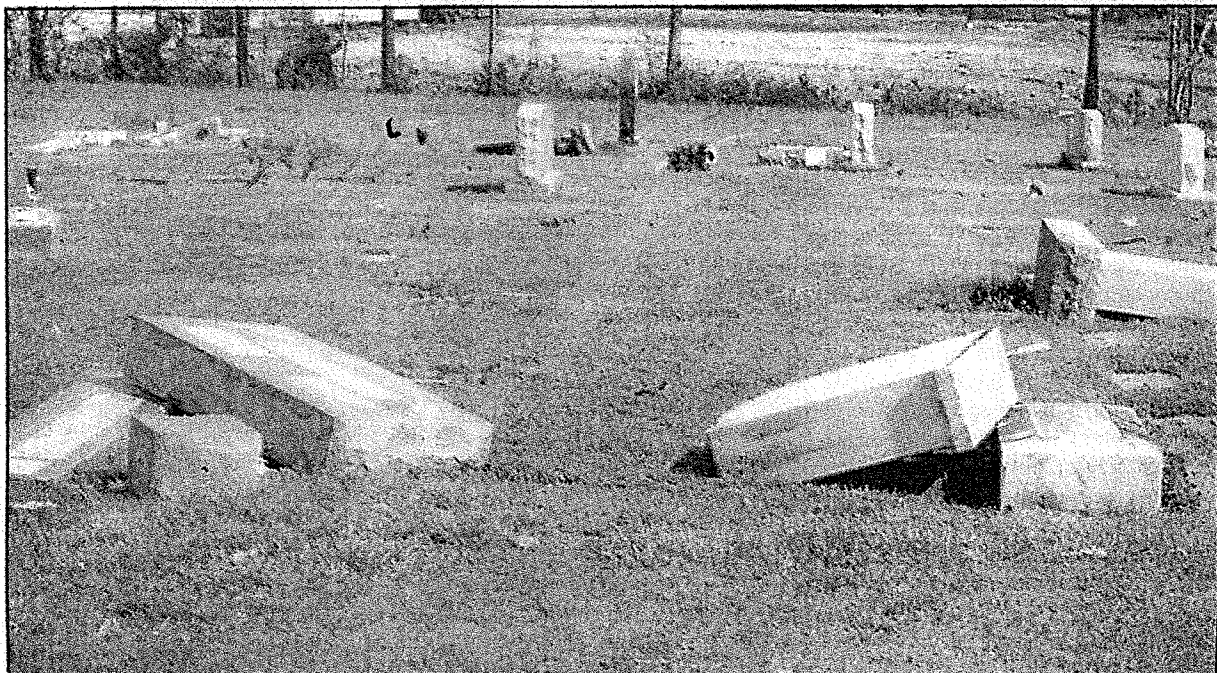
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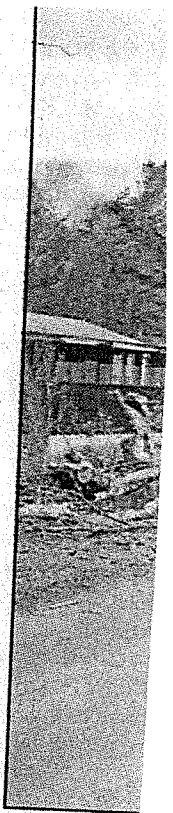
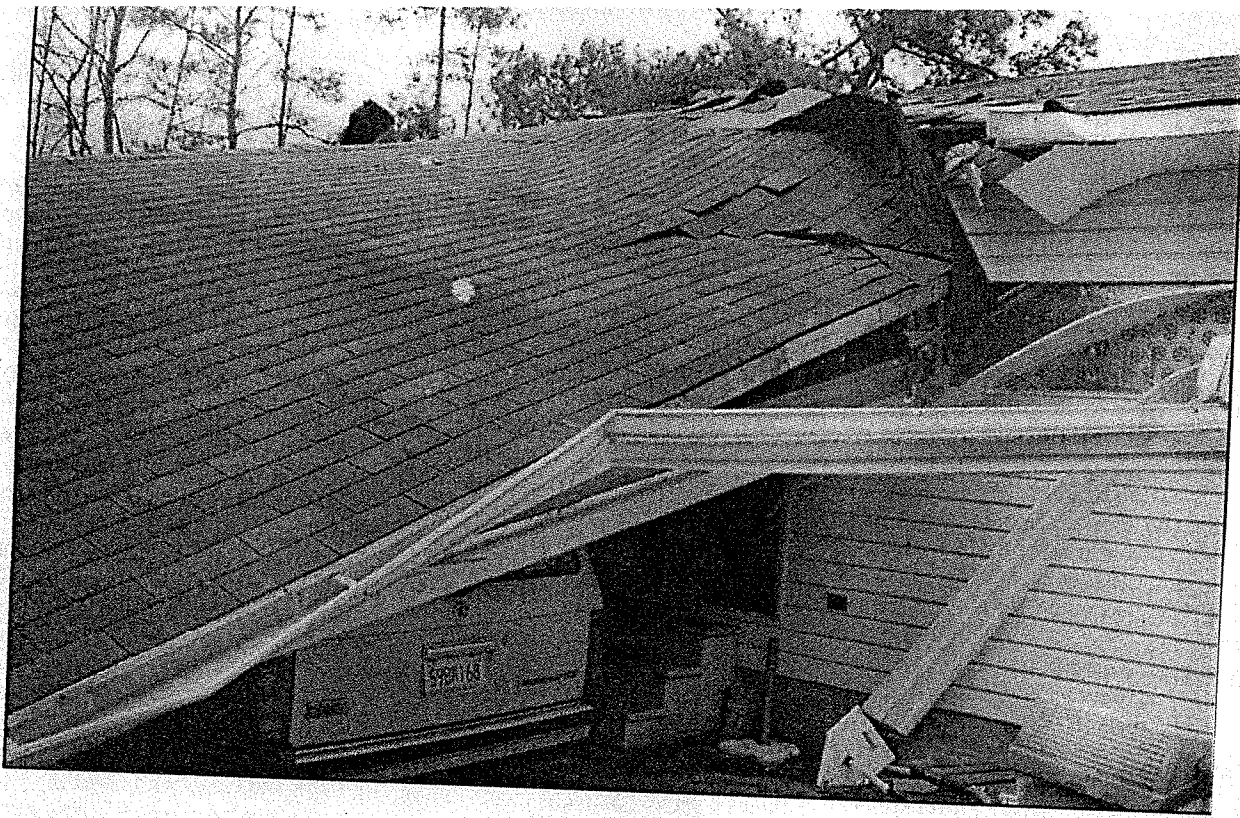


Stan J. Griffin/News-Aegis

**THE FORCE OF NATURE**—Pictured is the home of Mt. Moriah resident Jan Harris. Her home was devastated by a powerful tornado which passed through St. Clair County last Wednesday. Harris has lived in Mt. Moriah for eight years.

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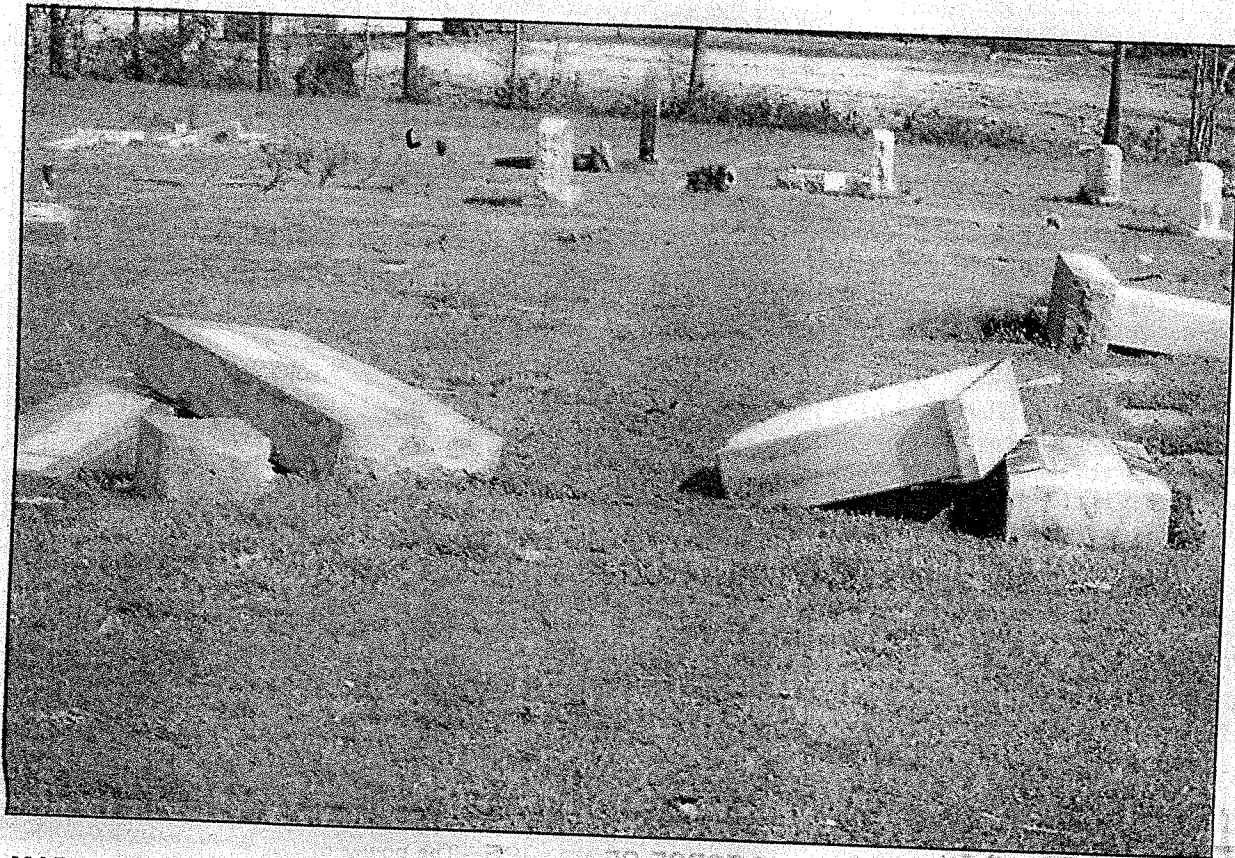




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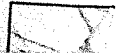
**CLEANING** community for night. Downed was also resp



**MARKERS TOPPLED BY STRONG WIND**—These markers at St. Clair Memorial Gardens were mysteriously toppled in opposite directions in the wake of the fierce tornado that hit St. Clair County on Wednesday, April 8. Most of the damage has been cleaned up and the markers set back in place as of Tuesday, April 13.

Deborah Braxton/News-Aegis

**SMITH HO** Road was o during the





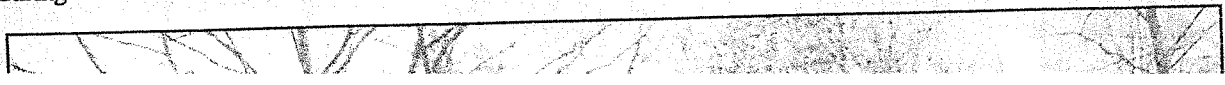
Stan J. Griffin/News-Aegis

**CLEANING UP**—Pictured is the scene from Mt. Moriah Road in St. Clair County last Thursday morning. The community faced a major rebuilding effort after a powerful tornado passed through the community last Wednesday night. Downed trees and severely-damaged houses were prevalent in the community following the twister. The storm was also responsible for two fatalities in the area.



Deborah Braxton/News-Aegis

**SMITH HOME DEMOLISHED BY TORNADO**—The Mt. Moriah home of Douglas and Vivian Smith on Pine Road was overturned by the April 8th tornado that swept through St. Clair County. The Smith family was at home during the storm and miraculously survived the destruction.



# Riley offers county officials assistance in filing for aid

By ERICA JOINER  
St. Clair News-Aegis

MOODY—U.S. Congressman Bob Riley assured St. Clair County officials last Friday that his office would do all it could to help citizens expedite their assistance claims.

St. Clair County, along with Jefferson and Tuscaloosa counties, were declared major disaster zones by President Bill Clinton on April 9, due to a deadly tornado that went through the area last Wednesday night.

Riley said of the damage within St. Clair, Jefferson and Tuscaloosa counties, "It is the worst I have ever seen. The Governor (Fob James) said that in all the state's research, they haven't seen anything like it. It is almost beyond belief." He added that he can't comprehend what that night must have been like for some of the residents.

"It is almost incomprehensible to imagine what kind of winds this must have been," Riley said.

Riley told St. Clair County Commission Chairman Roy Banks, Moody Mayor Bill Morris, Pell City Mayor Mack Abercrombie, Springville Mayor Charles Griffin and Springville Police Chief Ron Black that his main concern now is to make sure all victims of the storm know what kind of aid is

available.

"We are trying to go out into the communities and just tell people what is available," Riley said.

The aid, which is being coordinated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), includes grants and low-interest loans. Also available are some federal funds to help the state with the cost of debris removal. To receive applications for assistance, call FEMA tele-registration at 1-800-462-9029 or the FEMA helpline at 1-800-462-7585 (TDD).

Riley said that he has received assurance from Vice President Al Gore that the applications for aid would be processed as quickly as possible and that once they are submitted, the recipients should expect relief within eight to 10 days.

Areas in St. Clair County that were hardest hit include the Mt. Moriah community and the Bethel Baptist Church in Moody, which was destroyed.

Riley added that during his travels through the disaster zones, his belief in the human spirit has been uplifted.

"I have been watching the level of volunteerism just within the last day. All of a sudden, you just see it all start to get cleaned up," Riley said. "You see people helping others; neighbors helping

neighbors."

Banks agreed with Riley. "I think it is a shining example of the deep South heritage."

Riley also admired the strength of the community's faith, especially Bethel Baptist's minister, the Rev. Chris Burns. Riley said that when he asked Burns about the church, Burns replied that the church was fine, but that the building needed a little work.

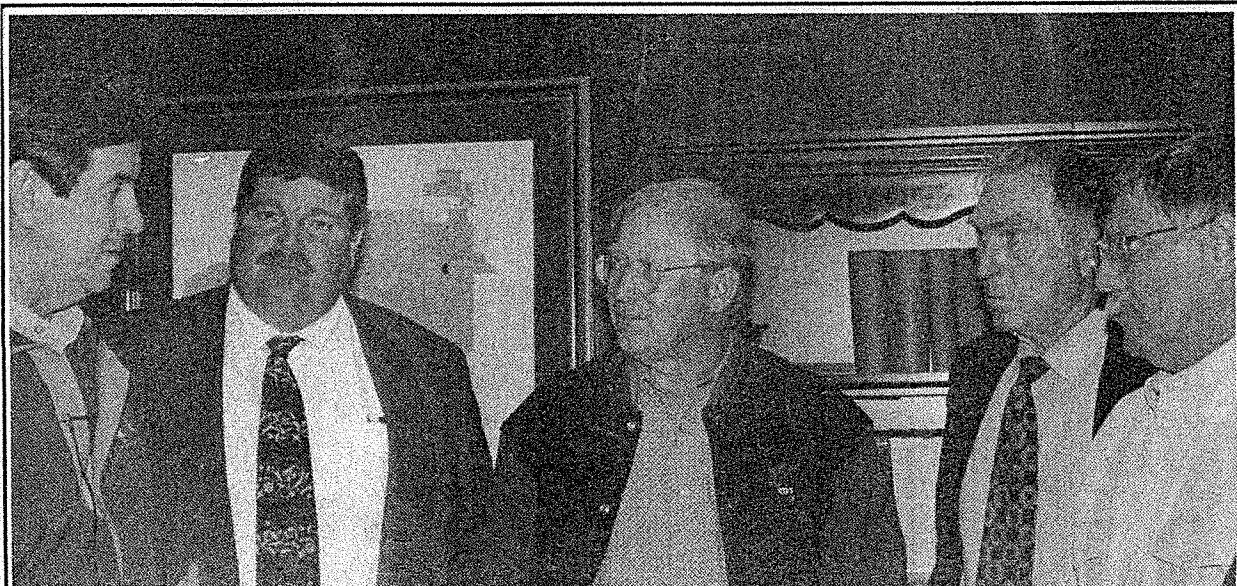
"The pastor is just a great guy," Riley said of Burns.

Riley added that his office was standing by to assist anyone who needed help in filling out applications for aid. To reach Riley's office, call 1-205-236-5655 or 1-202-225-3261.

Moody Mayor Bill Morris said of Riley's visit, "I appreciate his concern. We really don't know what to say. He is a super guy and is genuine in his concern."

Banks agreed with Morris. "We are so pleased that we have a congressman whose schedule is not too busy to comfort those in need. As Chairman of the County Commission, I intend to follow up on this."

Although neither Pell City nor Springville suffered any damage from the storm, both mayors Mack Abercrombie and Charles Griffin attended the meeting to offer any support needed by Moody or St. Clair County.



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# assistance in filing for aid

By ERICA JOINER  
St. Clair News-Aegis

MOODY—U.S. Congressman Bob Riley assured St. Clair County officials last Friday that his office would do all it could to help citizens expedite their assistance claims.

St. Clair County, along with Jefferson and Tuscaloosa counties, were declared major disaster zones by President Bill Clinton on April 9, due to a deadly tornado that went through the area last Wednesday night.

Riley said of the damage within St. Clair, Jefferson and Tuscaloosa counties, "It is the worst I have ever seen. The Governor (Fob James) said that in all the state's research, they haven't seen anything like it. It is almost beyond belief." He added that he can't comprehend what that night must have been like for some of the residents.

"It is almost incomprehensible to imagine what kind of winds this must have been," Riley said.

Riley told St. Clair County Commission Chairman Roy Banks, Moody Mayor Bill Morris, Pell City Mayor Mack Abercrombie, Springville Mayor Charles Griffin and Springville Police Chief Ron Black that his main concern now is to make sure all victims of the storm know what kind of aid is

available.

"We are trying to go out into the communities and just tell people what is available," Riley said.

The aid, which is being coordinated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), includes grants and low-interest loans. Also available are some federal funds to help the state with the cost of debris removal. To receive applications for assistance, call FEMA tele-registration at 1-800-462-9029 or the FEMA helpline at 1-800-462-7585 (TDD).

Riley said that he has received assurance from Vice President Al Gore that the applications for aid would be processed as quickly as possible and that once they are submitted, the recipients should expect relief within eight to 10 days.

Areas in St. Clair County that were hardest hit include the Mt. Moriah community and the Bethel Baptist Church in Moody, which was destroyed.

Riley added that during his travels through the disaster zones, his belief in the human spirit has been uplifted.

"I have been watching the level of volunteerism just within the last day. All of a sudden, you just see it all start to get cleaned up," Riley said. "You see people helping others; neighbors helping

neighbors."

Banks agreed with Riley. "I think it is a shining example of the deep South heritage."

Riley also admired the strength of the community's faith, especially Bethel Baptist's minister, the Rev. Chris Burns. Riley said that when he asked Burns about the church, Burns replied that the church was fine, but that the building needed a little work.

"The pastor is just a great guy," Riley said of Burns.

Riley added that his office was standing by to assist anyone who needed help in filling out applications for aid. To reach Riley's office, call 1-205-236-5655 or 1-202-225-3261.

Moody Mayor Bill Morris said of Riley's visit, "I appreciate his concern. We really don't know what to say. He is a super guy and is genuine in his concern."

Banks agreed with Morris. "We are so pleased that we have a congressman whose schedule is not too busy to comfort those in need. As Chairman of the County Commission, I intend to follow up on this."

Although neither Pell City nor Springville suffered any damage from the storm, both mayors Mack Abercrombie and Charles Griffin attended the meeting to offer any support needed by Moody or St. Clair County.



Erica Joiner/News-Aegis

**GIVING HIS ASSISTANCE**—U.S. Congressman Bob Riley offered his assistance to (l-r) Moody Mayor Bill Morris, Pell City Mayor Mack Abercrombie, St. Clair County Commission Chairman Roy Banks and Springville Mayor Charles Griffin on April 10. Riley traveled through the areas of devastation in St. Clair County that were

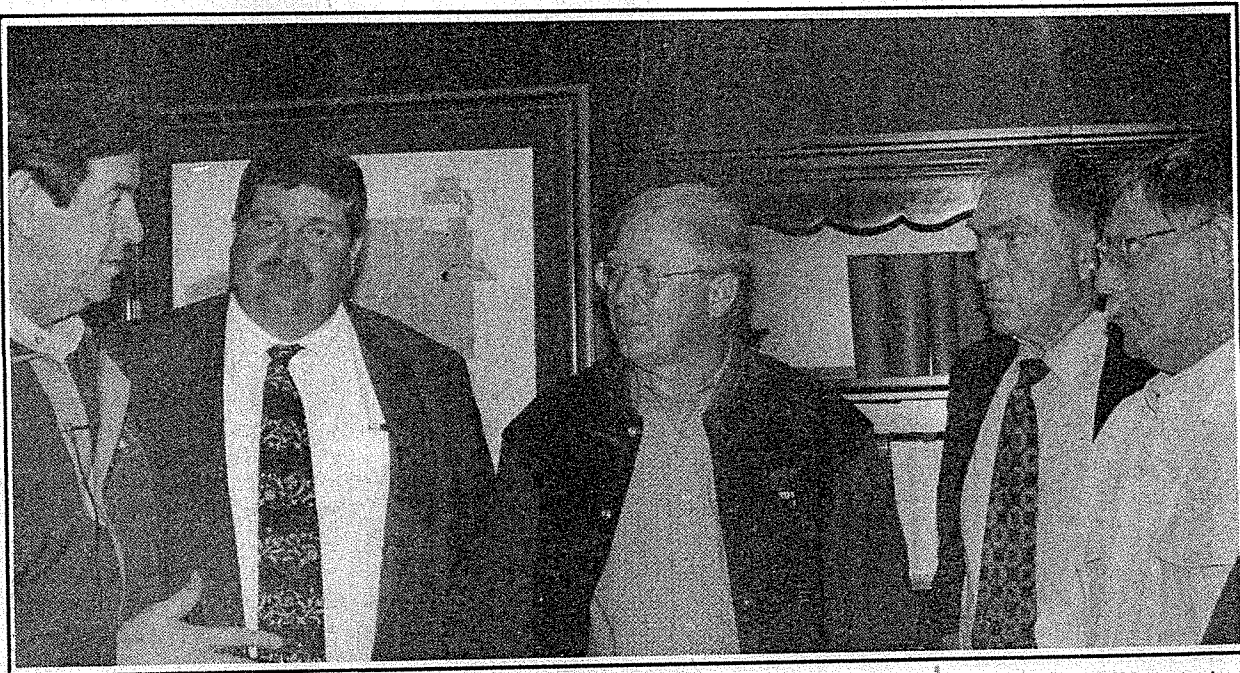
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**GIVING HIS ASSISTANCE**—U.S. Congressman Bob Riley offered his assistance to (l-r) Moody Mayor Bill Morris, Pell City Mayor Mack Abercrombie, St. Clair County Commission Chairman Roy Banks and Springville Mayor Charles Griffin on April 10. Riley traveled through the areas of devastation in St. Clair County that were caused by a tornado on April 8.

## Disaster Recovery Center stationed at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church

PELL CITY—The St. Clair Emergency Management Agency's Mobile Disaster Recovery Center will be stationed at the Mt. Moriah Baptist Church, located at 425 Mt. Moriah Road, April 16, 17, 18.

Also, if you want to help out those that were affected by this

needed at this time:

Household items such as pots and pans; cooking utensils, eating utensils; dishes; dish towels; blankets; towels and other linens; also cleaning products and cleaning tools such as brooms,

mops, buckets, and vacuum cleaners.

Financial donations are also being accepted by Mt. Moriah Church for direct use of victims.

The American Red Cross is also accepting financial donations.

county) being placed under a warning. They are always available, and are very helpful in transferring messages, and we even have them in places that are potential shelters relaying back information. They are a very valuable resource that we just really need"

On Friday of last week, Lee Helms, the Alabama Emergency Management Agency director, and other members of the state EMA, as well as representatives of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-were in St. Clair County to view the storm damage in the county by helicopter, along with members of the St. Clair County Commission.

"Governor (Fob) James wanted me to come over today and talk to the local officials, and see if there was anything else that the state needed to do," said Helms. "We also wanted to talk about the presidential (disaster area) declaration and explain the application process, and make sure the victims know how they can get help if they need help."

Helms said that seeing the St. Clair damage firsthand confirmed for him even more just how powerful the Category F-5 tornado was.

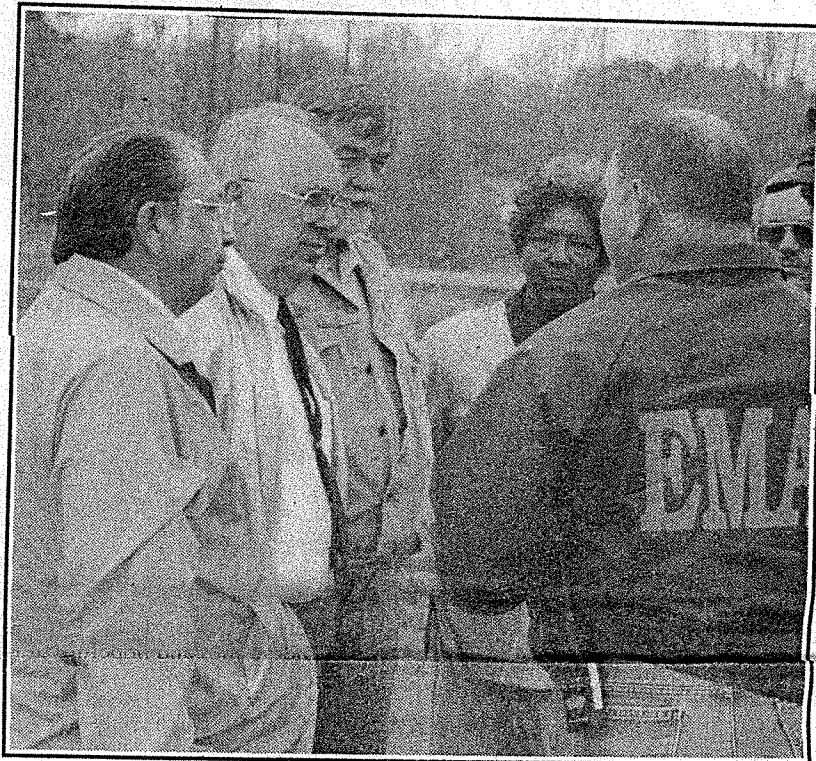
"It is severe damage, and it is a real terrible situation," said Helms. "I have seen a lot of tornadoes, but this thing that happened the other night caused the worst damage I have ever seen. After talking to as many people as I have, I'm sure that if people had not paid attention to the warnings and put their emergency plans into effect, there would have been a lot more people hurt and killed."

Helms said he has nothing but

community," said Ford. "Even though there is more devastation in Jefferson County, they took time to come out and see what we have, and that we need help too."

"I certainly do appreciate Mr.

been done and the lives that have been turned upside down, the steps that have been taken to prepare for an emergency like this has enabled the situation to have been handled efficiently."



Stan J. Griffin/News-Aegis

**SURVEYING THE SCENE**—Alabama Emergency Management Agency Director Lee Helms (wearing EMA jacket) paid a visit to St. Clair County last Friday to survey the damage of last Wednesday's tornado along with members of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and members of the St. Clair County Commission. Also pictured left to right are County Commissioner Jimmy Roberts, County Commissioner James Ethridge, County Commissioner Charles Ford, St. Clair EMA Director Gwen Looney, and St. Clair County Coroner Jeff Wyatt.