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## ST. ROBERT

# Leaders remind community to "soldier on"

Mayor Luge Hardman addresses citizens about flood recovery efforts

**Mandy Matney**  
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Community leaders reminded the grief-stricken members of the Waynesville-St. Robert Chamber of Commerce that this is a community that will "soldier on" and bounce back.

Chamber President Mike Dunbar said they decided to hold the meeting despite flood devastation.

"We need to put a smile on, but we're going to remember those who aren't so blessed as some of us in this room," Dunbar said. "We want to keep all the victims in mind, especially the family who suffered the ultimate loss at such a young age. But we will pick ourselves up and just drive on."

Waynesville Mayor Luge Hardman delivered a heartfelt speech, starting by thanking a long list of individuals who have helped respond and recover from the dev-



**Waynesville Mayor Luge Hardman addresses Chamber of Commerce members regarding flood recovery efforts.** PHOTO BY MANDY MATNEY

astation.

"It has been an emotional week," Hardman said. "I will tell you right up front that there are no more professional people than [Pulaski County Sheriff] Ron Long [and Pulaski County Presiding Commissioner] Gene Newkirk. [Waynesville Rural Fire Department Chief] Doug Yurecko the morning they were pulling people from trees; [County Clerk Brent Bassett] never left."

"I want to thank the law enforcement, our entire community, our volunteers, our churches, our media, our military neighbors - one of the first phone calls I received was from [Maj.] General [Leslie] Smith."

Hardman also thanked civic

organizations, Waynesville-St. Robert Chamber of Commerce, and Pulaski County Sewer District, which she said spent three

*"...[I]n this optimistic spirit I say, 'Let's soldier on'."*

days pumping out residents' flooded basements free of charge. She thanked the cities of St. Robert, Crocker, Lebanon, and "other cities from neighboring counties who have offered all kinds of help."

Hardman, choking back tears, then spoke about the true tragedy that struck the community last week - losing two of its own citizens Jessica and Elyjah Lee.

"As a community we embrace Jessica as our sister, our daughter, our friend. And little Ely, if you

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# EFFORTS

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haven't seen his picture, it will break your heart. Think of the heartache that could have been even worse," the mayor continued, before turning to address recovery and cleanup efforts the city is currently undergoing.

"We've been in a response mode, but now it is recovery," she said. "Trash has been our big issue."

She said they have been very concerned with public health and have been working on getting places for those who lost their homes to live.

"We have been moving forward in Waynesville and we are already thinking about rebuilding."

Hardman then thanked the local relief organizations including, Pulaski Co-Ed. Group, Pulaski Coalition, MARC [Multi-Agency Resource Center], Red Cross, Salvation Army, Goodwill, and Good Samaritan Resource Center.

Hardman also thanked Mayor George Sanders, Crocker Mayor Cliff Hammock, Waynesville City Administrator Bruce Harrill, the Waynesville City Council, City Clerk Carol Welch, Stephanie--, Police Chief Bob Carter and the Waynesville Police Department.

"We have a great staff at the city of Waynesville," she said. "These people have worked without complaining."

Hardman said she focused a lot on speaking with the media because she felt it was important to continue to inform the public on what was going on and what was being done.

"I have been the spokesman for the city and my citizens. But I was not and am not the fireman who rescued the lady from the tree. I am not the highway patrolman who jumped in a boat, risking his own life in raging waters to save other people. I am not the policeman who carried our lost child. I am not the city worker who

climbed a utility pole in raging water to catch a live electric wire. I am not the EMT who carried the elderly man to safety. And I'm not the fireman who discovered our lost mother. I am not the Red Cross Worker who hugged scared and frightened people at the shelter. I am not the funeral director who has comforted the Lee family. And I am not the citizen who has lost everything and really has no idea what to do next.

But I am the leader of Waynesville and I will work hard to coordinate our efforts. I will be the comforter. I'm going to hug you, I will reassure you, I will be your friend when you need someone to talk to and share your concerns. And I am the face of the City of Waynesville and I'm the face of the city that will bounce back and be even better. To my community, I thank you for everything you have done for us. And in this optimistic spirit I say, 'Let's soldier on.'"