

## Grand Forks Air Force Base

Well before the flood began its relentless takeover of Grand Forks, the Grand Forks Air Force Base, located 15 miles west of the city, threw its flight caps into the ring.

The Base was ordered to minimal manning and then sent busloads of off-duty personnel to help fill sandbags, shore up dikes and eventually help rescue people stranded by floodwaters. Of the estimated 3.5 million sandbags that were used in the flood fight, it's estimated the base was responsible for filling approximately 800,000 bags.

When a mandatory evacuation was ordered for Grand Forks, six shelters were set up on base for evacuees. At its peak, the base housed approximately 3,500 people - mainly civilians. Most stayed in three aircraft hangar bays.

President Bill Clinton visited the base shelters on April 22, and after seeing the plight of the people, he upped federal assistance from \$200 million to \$488 million.

As if the community didn't have enough to worry about, fire broke out in downtown Grand Forks at the height of the flood. Eleven buildings were destroyed, and it could have been worse if not for the response of base firemen and their 63-ton P-15 crash vehicle - the largest fire truck in the Air Force inventory. Base firefighters poured nearly 100,000 gallons of water on the fire from midnight to 9 a.m.

Members of the 79th Rescue Flight, flying HH-1H Iroquois helicopters, provided helicopter support to local emergency operations center officials by flying emergency evacuation missions and medical evacuation flights. In one weekend alone, the 79th, part of the 321st Missile Group, transported 45 patients being evacuated.

When United Hospital in Grand Forks took on water, many of the patients the rescue flight transported were taken directly to the base hospital. Before it was all over, the 319th Medical Group had 457 new patients and had to use the base elementary school to shelter and take care of them.

## Grand Forks County

The flood of 1997 had an enormous impact on Grand Forks County government. The county occupied five buildings in downtown Grand Forks: The county office building, social services, sheriff's department, courthouse and correctional center. The sheriff's department building was severely damaged while the county office and social services buildings sustained damage in the basement and first floors. The courthouse and the correctional center - a co-joined building - had extensive damage to the basement offices, while the correctional center had flooding on the first floor with damage to the boilers in the basement.

The County Commission decided to consolidate the social services, sheriff's department and the county office staff into a new structure. A site across the street from the courthouse was selected for the new county office building. In cooperation with the City of Grand Forks, the sheriff's department was co-located in the city police department's building. The City/County Public Health Department moved from the police building into the new county office building.

The county offices closed on Friday, April 18 and reopened in Larimore North Dakota, 30 miles west of Grand Forks, the following Monday. Most county services operated out of Larimore until the end of August. The correctional center set-up a temporary facility in the National Guard Armory located west of Interstate 29 and transported inmates to whatever facilities had the room to assist with inmate needs. In August of 1997 the county offices, the district court and the correctional center returned to Grand Forks. The social services staff abandoned the first floor of its building and

provided daily service from the top three floors. The first floor staff in the county office relocated into the courthouse.

Construction of the new county office building began in 1998. The cost of the building was approximately \$20,000,000. The 135,000 square foot structure was designed to enhance the appearance of the courthouse. The new county office building opened in January 2000. It was designed with flood mitigation in mind. The building does not have a basement and the first floor is 13 inches above the waterline of the 1997 flood. All the mechanical equipment was placed on the seventh floor and key electrical components are five feet above the 1997 waterline.

In order to prevent future loss and archive recovered documents, the county initiated a process to store all documents on CD Rom. Whenever possible, recovered documents and newly created documents are scanned into the county's server. In the event of a future flood, this media can be easily cleaned and files can be restored without incurring loss of or cost of sanitizing and restoring documents.

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