



Historic Flood - Remarkable Recovery
Grand Forks, ND
10 Years Later...Rebuilt. Renewed. Reborn.



Grand Forks is Rebuilt, Renewed, Reborn.

In April 1997, the eyes of the nation were on Grand Forks, North Dakota as the city fought valiantly to keep a flood of epic proportions from swallowing it whole.

Nearly all the city's 52,000 residents were evacuated as the battle against the raging Red River of the North proved too formidable.

When it seemed the worst might be over, fire broke out in the heart of the city's downtown, jumping from building to building and rendering firefighters virtually helpless to stop it.

In the end, about 75 percent of the city had flooded and Grand Forks faced its biggest challenge yet – rebuilding. Many wondered if it was possible to come back.

Now, a decade later,
Grand Forks is back!

*A Decade After
Disaster:*



Long gone is the war-zone appearance of a city ravaged by one of the worst disasters in North Dakota history.

In its place is a city rebuilt, renewed and reborn. It is a city that now holds the promise of a future that will better protect it from the tragedy of the past.

For Grand Forks, the recovery has been a study in courage, strength and vision. The lessons learned have been valuable and at times painful. But those lessons have helped the city grow and thrive into a community that is on the move.

Recovery Takes Strong Leadership

Before floodwaters even fully receded, the city, state and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) were looking ahead to the recovery.

Commitments to rebuild were firm and resounding. Grand Forks Mayor Pat Owens, who captured the hearts of the nation with her candor and courage, pledged that the city would return better than ever and calmly but repeatedly urged residents to “Keep the Faith.”

Joint recovery teams set immediate priorities: Re-establish government and public safety first. Debris removal and restoration of gas and electrical power quickly began. The city’s crippled water treatment plant was brought back on line enough to restore running water in 13 days; drinkable water in 23 days.

The city methodically let residents and business owners back in to survey their losses and to begin cleanup. Neighbors helped neighbors, and key businesses vowed to return.

Local elected officials soon learned one of the hardest lessons of disaster recovery: The decisions they’d make would be endless, difficult, often contentious and for some, politically fatal.

Yet each decision was based on what was right for the community-at-large and was essential to move Grand Forks forward.

Leaders wrestled with such topics as: Should the



initial focus be the recovery of residences or businesses?
Should they relax city codes to spur rebuilding? How could the tax base be restored? Whose homes would be rebuilt, relocated or demolished? Which neighborhoods could be preserved and which must be laid to rest in order to protect the entire community in the future?

To jumpstart the long-term recovery, elected officials were joined by community leaders, business owners and individuals who shared a vision and a passion for bringing the city back.

They worked hand-in-hand with state and federal partners, tapping the vast experience and resources government can provide.

They established forums for community input and strived to keep citizens informed about the recovery progress, even when the news was bad.

They balanced essential short-term needs with longer-range planning.

They allowed themselves to “re-imagine” the city and create areas that could be different and inviting.

Building Back Better

To Grand Forks, rebuilding wasn't just about fixing damaged structures or constructing new ones. It also was about taking steps to help minimize the impact of another flood.

Local leaders included mitigation elements in the city's rebuilding and encouraged citizens and businesses to do the same. They required that rebuilding comply with pre-disaster floodplain ordinances.

Today, the city's critical infrastructure, government buildings, even its official records are better protected.

Downtown, buildings that were rebuilt or newly built have been floodproofed. Open-space pocket parks with sculptures or art have replaced substantially flooded and burned-out buildings.

A town square, built to easily weather a future flood, provides a community gathering place for such activities as farmer's markets, art festivals, small musical concerts, or an occasional game of checkers.

New residential subdivisions have been built away from the river.

More than 325 devastated homes in

the most vulnerable flood areas were bought out and removed. The resulting open space now is a phenomenal greenway that spans both sides of the river, providing a 2,200-acre buffer between the water and its closest neighbors.

The crown jewel of the city's mitigation efforts is a \$409 million flood-control project, expected to be completed in 2007, that is designed to protect Grand Forks and neighboring East Grand Forks, Minnesota using a combination of earthen levees, concrete floodwalls, pumping stations, shut-off valves, a coulee diversion and the greenway.

Grand Forks Today

Now since its 'Flood of the Century,' Grand Forks is smarter, better prepared and thriving.

The city's population has surpassed its pre-flood level. Economic mileposts such as tax collections, property valuations and building permits are at record levels.

Housing developments and new businesses have relentlessly pushed the city boundaries.

The public school system, hard hit by the flood but still considered among the best in the country, has improved its facilities and programs.

The University of North Dakota's enrollment is at record levels and the school's research and commercialization efforts have rocketed, positioning Grand Forks at the forefront of energy development, health care and unmanned aerial systems.

The once ravaged downtown is alive and vibrant. Restaurant and business icons have returned and been joined by newcomers. Historic structures have been restored. New housing developments, including high-end condominiums, will bring more residents downtown.

The city's south end has exploded with new housing subdivisions and commercial growth, including a Canadian developer's \$50 million hotel and entertainment complex.

The city's industrial park, where more than 1,000 jobs have been added in the last two years, continues to flourish with business expansions and the arrival of new companies.

Grand Forks has learned that recovery from a catastrophic disaster is neither quick nor easy. It takes leadership, partnership, patience, faith and people.

Above all else, it is **the people** who make recovery happen – citizens, business owners, elected officials, government partners, volunteers, disaster-relief workers and politicians.

Because of them, Grand Forks was able to “Keep the Faith” that its city would indeed come back from the brink of disaster – rebuilt, renewed and reborn.

Reborn.
Rebuilt. Renewed.