

# When I-35W bridge collapsed, whole community pitched in

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The tragedy on the Interstate 35W bridge will forever be part of our community. And the way our community has responded will forever be a part of our lives.

We have yet to meet a first responder who takes credit for doing anything more than the job asks. We see it as bravery; they can't imagine doing anything less. We watch as mental health counselors console those grieving. What do you tell a person who has lost a loved one? Thankfully, our community has so many professionals who know what to say. We see government officials lead command centers, manage logistics, make instant decisions, and implement a plan they've practiced for years - all with passion and compassion.

The heroes among us may not wear a uniform. But nothing stops them from helping. On Aug. 1, the American Red Cross, led by its Twin Cities Chapter, was literally at the doorstep of the disaster. Our building is just block away from the collapsed bridge. Red Cross staff and volunteers, trained to save lives and comfort people, responded immediately.

A busload of children received physical and emotional help in our building while their parents rushed to the scene. First responders set up camp in our parking lot. Police were everywhere on horseback, rescue boats were towed in, and helicopters hovered overhead, even landing on a make-shift helipad next door.

The Red Cross sent blood products to area hospitals caring for victims. We comforted more than 700 people dealing with grief, trauma and medical conditions. We provided emotional support to more than 1,300 people who expressed concern about missing loved ones. We've been supporting the first responders by serving more than 35,000 meals and snacks. More than 650 people registered for Safe and Well - a successful Red Cross program that links families with their loved ones to know they're safe.

We'll be there supporting, comforting and responding for as long as it takes. We also recognize and appreciate the many other charitable groups performing vital services during this time; we all benefit when these groups work together, making sure functions are not duplicated.

The connection between Minnesotans was made stronger, sadly, by the collapse of a bridge designed to connect people. The American Red Cross is grateful for the plan that our community had in place at the time of this disaster. We had the necessary blood supply on hand because so many of you had donated before the accident. Today, we urge you to make an appointment to donate blood so we remain ready.

We appreciate those of you who have donated money. By Aug. 3, without knowing the total cost of the disaster, we believed we had raised enough money to cover the cost of our response to this disaster, and felt it was important to tell the public. Today, your ongoing support for local chapter operations will keep us healthy and ready for future disasters and emergencies.

Our volunteer base is 1,450 strong, so we were ready to respond. Today, we are enlisting the hundreds of "spontaneous volunteers" who called that night asking what they can do. There's plenty of work left to do and we look forward to bringing these new supporters into our volunteer family.

We are also grateful for support from businesses, corporations and foundations that have been our vital partners in the past, and have shown a commitment to emergency preparedness for the future. We're grateful for the support from our federal, state, county and city partners. We never doubted the enormity of the compassion of the people of the Twin Cities. Because of you, your Red Cross was ready for this disaster and we sincerely thank you. No matter what emergency we encounter in the future, your spirit of caring and our dedicated staff and volunteers will ensure that the Twin Cities, Minnesota and our entire region are ready.

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