

Cunningham Park

Joplin, Missouri

The historic EF-5 tornado that struck Joplin, Missouri, on May 22, 2011, devastated the entire community, but meteorologists indicate the twister's power was at its strongest in downtown Cunningham Park, which had been a restful haven for city residents for more than a century. Prior to the tornado, the park featured tennis and basketball courts, playground equipment, picnic pavilions, a walking trail, and a pool, but the storm razed everything to the ground, leaving the community of Joplin bereft of its beloved park when it needed it the most.

Fortunately, support poured in from across the country, including huge corporate grants from Coca-Cola and Walmart, and even ABC's hit show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* pitched in to lend a hand. Crews broke ground last October to restore the park and build a tribute to the 170,000 volunteers who helped rebuild the city. Today, a reflecting pool sits on the site of the original playground, and the swimming pool now features multiple slides and other exciting waterpark-style structures. The renewed and enlarged park now also boasts an updated playground system with more interactive features,



and the lasting effects of the tornado are commemorated both through the volunteer tribute and a memorial to the 161 people who lost their lives. Future park developments may include a butterfly garden and an overlook with storyboards detailing the storm's impact on the city, plus additional parking to handle the thousands of visitors who arrive each day.

Given the surplus of donations sent to the ravaged community, city officials have announced their plans to build a new neighborhood park nearby. But with Cunningham Park's renovation less than a year and a half after its destruction, the residents of Joplin once again have a place to relax, reflect, and enjoy the very best of their revived community.

—Danielle Taylor

