



BASTROP, TEXAS

NEW AND EXISTING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AID IN RECOVERY

QUICK FACTS – BASTROP COUNTY, TEXAS

Founded in 1832; incorporated in 1937

9.34 square miles, located 30 mi southeast of Austin; part of the Greater Austin metropolitan area

Population around 97,000; over 87 percent White, about 5 percent Black and 2.4 percent Native American

11.2 percent of families below the poverty level

3,517 housing units, over 55.9 percent owner-occupied

Council-manager form of government; the Bastrop City Council consists of the mayor and five council members.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Bastrop's largest industries include construction and retail trade. Both employ around 12.6 percent of the workforce; with manufacturing employing 4.1 percent and transportation and warehousing around 3.5 percent.¹ The highest paying industries include utilities at about \$134,452 per job, and mining at \$125,956 on average per job.² Employment in Bastrop County has grown at a rate of 15.5 percent in the last five years, ranking in the top 60 counties for most growth in that time.³

DISASTER IMPACTS

Starting in 1996, extreme wildfire seasons have become more common. With changes in weather cycles, drought, population, and land use, Texas wildfires are becoming larger and more difficult to contain. In 2001, the region experienced devastating wildfires. Thousands of acres were burnt, with

detrimental effects to the local economy in the short term. In the long term, the increase in fires threatens the sustainability of local business, infrastructure, and the economic resilience of the region. For the purposes of this case study, the strategies discussed will primarily focus on the 2015 wildfire which was accompanied by unprecedented levels of destruction. The wildfire burned 4,383 acres and destroyed 48 homes.⁴

More recently, the region has seen many natural disasters including Memorial Day flooding in both 2015 and 2016, the Halloween flood in 2015, the 2016 Tax Day Flood and Hurricane Harvey in 2017.⁵ The number of natural disasters in Bastrop County has increased by 171 percent over the past four decades according to FEMA data.

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

There are many economic and safety concerns surrounding disasters. These concerns are heightened when multiple disasters occur within a small time period, reducing the recovery period. Bastrop County has the eighth highest numbers of disasters in Texas, according to FEMA data. One of the largest challenges facing Bastrop County during these disasters is the destruction of residential homes and commercial businesses. This is especially true when they are in or near impacted flood plains.⁶

APPROACH

In 2015 when the region was hit by devastating fires and floods leaders realized the need for an organization dedicated to recovery efforts. Bastrop Chamber of Commerce created the Business Recovery Center (BRC) in October of 2015. The BRC's central goal was to provide local businesses with a community meeting spot in the wake of a disaster. It provided direct relief to businesses and, over time, was transformed into

a non-profit that could receive and raise funds for residents and businesses alike. With this transformation it came to be known as the Bastrop County Business Recovery Team (BCBRT). Today, disaster-related responsibilities and needs are met by the Bastrop County Long Term Recovery Team (BCLTRT), a further iteration of the original BRC.

This organization partners with Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) which is comprised of community members working to help the region's residents get back into their homes and businesses back on their feet post-disaster.⁷ COAD does not provide direct services to the community; instead, it is a network that organizations can work through to support their missions. COAD's membership is made up of local organizations from the nonprofit, public, private, governmental, faith-based, and community-based sectors.⁸ These organizations work to provide a network during all phases of a disaster: preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation.⁹

PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS

COAD has worked closely with Bastrop's Chamber of Commerce which acts as a line of communication between organizations helping the community.¹⁰ COAD serves the community by identifying volunteers to distribute resources, and organizations that can provide financial and material donations. It also provides the community with critical updates through its media platforms such as Facebook, city websites, and press releases.¹¹

The Bastrop Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) hired The Retail Coach, a retail recruitment firm, in 2012 to conduct an analysis to better understand the economic impact of Bastrop businesses.¹² The study found that while Bastrop has a small population, its retail trade sector serves a significantly larger population. When the town is hit with a disaster it is not just felt by Bastrop but also the surrounding regions that rely on the local businesses.¹³ With insights from The Retail Coach's report, BEDC was able to recruit several businesses to the local economy.¹⁴ Among the businesses brought to the area are Hobby Lobby, Home Goods, and Chick-Fil-A.

LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

Long-term local infrastructure investment is essential to the region. Following wildfires, the city led efforts to protect historical and residential buildings. Bastrop is home to more than 130 historic buildings which can attract tourists and businesses to the area. Additionally, most citizens who were affected by the fire have chosen to build within Bastrop, further showing that despite the disasters the community is choosing to stay.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES OVERVIEW

Financial resources have been primarily funneled through COAD with the help of the Bastrop County Chamber of Commerce. While the Business Recovery Center facilitated loan requests and distributed philanthropic financial donations in 2015, the BCLTRT has now assumed responsibility. The county has found comfort in relying on its own community organizations and businesses in times of disaster, and feels these organizations are best able to understand the needs and provide resources for the region. At the same time, federal assistance through FEMA has been essential to the region's long-term recovery efforts.

PREPAREDNESS EFFORTS

Preparing the community is central to Bastrop County's approach. Preparedness has not only saved lives but has also prevented long term destruction. Mike Fisher, emergency management coordinator, commented on the community's ability to evacuate roughly 5,000 people over a period of about four hours. During the 2011 wildfire. Fisher said, "I personally feel that because of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) and because of that planning and training, we were successful in saving hundreds if not thousands of lives in this terrible Bastrop fire".¹⁵ Bastrop developed one of the first CWPPs in 2006 before most of their disastrous wildfires took place. CWPPs are designed to assess hazards, identify risks, and set goals for mitigation. One mitigation goal was to move dead and fallen material as it can serve as understory fuel. When this fuel ignites it results in hotter, larger, and longer fires that can be difficult to control. The county received a grant from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) to fund this project.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Inclusion is key to meeting the community's needs. In addition to taking on the responsibilities of the recovery center, the BCLTRT mission includes a focus on low-income, uninsured, or underinsured individuals and families recovering from natural or manmade disasters.¹⁶ BCLTRT follows through on its mission by having affected individuals and families work closely with a case manager who helps them identify and address their unmet needs.¹⁷ The BCLTRT mission ensures that a larger population of Bastrop residents is protected.

TAKEAWAYS

Key takeaways from this case study include the importance of developing organizational capacity and actively engaging with stakeholders across multiple sectors including economic development, government, and private industry. Private-public partnerships have played a significant role in the community's disaster recovery and preparedness. Most notably, the evolution of the business recovery center into the BCLTRT, a robust non-profit that is engaged in ongoing disaster planning and preparedness efforts, speaks to the increasing resilience of Bastrop County.

SUMMARY

It is important for leaders to understand the potential risks their community faces and to be prepared to address them. Bastrop County illustrates the importance of identifying these risks and setting goals for mitigation. Despite the challenges, businesses and community leaders understand that preparedness is the best defense against disasters. Whether it be the original business recovery center, or the now prominent partnership between BCLTRT and COAD in leading short-term response efforts, it is the willingness of the community to work as a team that is a key lesson from the Bastrop County experience.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Indiana Business Research Center at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business, and U.S. Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration. "USA Counties in Profile." *StatsAmerica*, 2021, https://www.statsamerica.org/uscp/default.aspx?geo_id=48021. Accessed 24 May 2022.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Wildfire Today. (2015, October 15). Bill Gabbert. "Fire in Bastrop County, Texas burns nine homes"
- ⁵ "Bastrop County cities receive \$28 million to protect against storm damage." *Elgin Courier*, Elgin Courier, 2022, <https://www.elgincourier.com/article/news/bastrop-county-cities-receive-28-million-protect-against-storm-damage>. Accessed 4 May 2022.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Community Organization Active in Disaster (COAD) Overview
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Becki Womble Phone Interview, March 9th 2022
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² The Retail Coach. (2020, May 26). *Case Study: Bastrop, Texas Rebounds After 2011 Fires*. The Retail Coach. Retrieved April 13, 2022, from <https://theretailcoach.net/bastrop-texas-rebounds-after-2011-fires/>
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Texas A&M Forest Service. (2012, September 4). *2011 Texas Wildfires - Common Denominators of Home Destruction*. Texas A&M Forest Service. Retrieved April 13, 2022, from https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/uploadedFiles/TFSMain/Preparing_for_Wildfires/Prepare_Your_Home_for_Wildfires/Contact_Us/2011%20Texas%20Wildfires.pdf
- ¹⁶ BCLTRT. (2015). *Bastrop County Long Term Recovery Team*. Bastrop County Long Term Recovery Team. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from <https://www.bcltrt.org/>
- ¹⁷ Ibid.