

Since April 9, 1998. . . How far we've come

By Ellen Fix
For The Crier

Nerve-wracking. Chaotic. Time-intensive. An emotional roller-coaster. That's

what it's been like to rebuild our home after the 1998 Dunwoody tornado. As one of my coworkers warned me, "You think the tornado was bad—you haven't seen anything



Ellen and Steve Fix tried to smile two years ago when the tornado destroyed their home on Fontainebleau Court. Saturday, their rebuilt home was part of the Lemonade Days Tour.



yet!"

Like everyone else who's home had to be repaired or rebuilt, we were forced to become "instant experts" in every aspect of home construction—from attic fans to foundations. And worse — a rampant problem in Atlanta's hot construction market

— good contractors are hard to find. And subs too often turn into no-shows. The ecstasy of seeing drywall go up is followed by hopelessness that the bricks will never arrive.

I have nothing against plumbers, carpenters, bricidayers, electricians, or painters. It's just that if something can go wrong, it will.

Meanwhile, there are exhaustive visits to home improvement suppliers. Endless decisions to make. And phone calls that start this way. . . Him: "The builder called." Me: "Is it good or bad?"

Which segues to the subject of money.

Here's really all you need to know before you build a home: curves always cost more. Change orders are double. And we won't even discuss upgrades.'

Still, I think my builder was better than average. (Okay, I'll give him a "plug:" Kim Medlin of Atlanta Custom

First Person

Homes, Inc.) There were times I thought he was a cheap, self-serving you-knowwhat. Of course, he likely regards me as the homeowner from hell. But, he treated me with civility. And he owned up to his mistakes.

Although he never wielded a hammer himself, he is computer-literate. We must have exchanged a hundred or more e-mail messages during the course of construction. On more than one occasion, I'd tiptoe down to the computer in the middle of the night,

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Tornado, from front

unable to sleep because of some minor concern—like, did he remember we wanted a chimney? And he'd e-mail me back early the next morning.

And truly, the aftermath of the tornado hasn't been all bad. I've made new friends. I've got a beautiful new home. I've developed a strong sense of pride in my community. And I feel more a part of Dunwoody than ever before.

Though those of us in

Fontainebleau Forest get our mail via the Doraville post office, it was Dunwoody that organized the Replant the Dunwoody Forest effort to help us replace trees. It is my heartfelt hope that the RDF will broaden its reforestation focus to encompass all new residential and office developments in our area, where thousands of trees are sacrificed daily. Tornado victims know all too well what a travesty it is to lose them.

My six-year-old keeps asking me when we can have a picnic under one of our newly-planted magnolias. And my eight-year-old will be an adolescent before he'll find a climbing tree on our property. The truth is, whenever I re-enter Fontainebleau, by foot or by car, I still get choked up as if re-experiencing the loss each time.

Thinking about trees brings on a twinge of nostalgia. We remember our cozy 1960's ranch, long-flattened by bulldozers, wistfully. With all its faults—uneven floors, doors that never quite shut, and a "master" bath that was tinier than

my builder's port-a-potty—it was our home for 10 years.

Now, some two years since the storm, our new abode envelops us with an expansive welcome.

Yet it will never mean as much to us as the warmth and support and gifts of time and money that came to us from friends, family, neighbors, Kingsley Elementary, churches, synagogues, colleagues, and complete strangers who came to our aid. You know who you are.

I would be remiss in not mentioning DeKalb County's assistance. In particular, Andy Massey, DeKalb County electrical inspec-

tor, and John Calcaterra, DeKalb County Chief Building Inspector, are to be commended for their conscientiousness and professionalism.

And though our new residence has consumed us for ten months, we remind ourselves that it's not an end in itself. It's a starting point—simply a base of operations from which we hope to participate in and improve upon life on this planet...to contribute to society...to make the world a better place.

We're thankful to be back.

Good service.

Good price.

Vandals, from front