

# Downtown residents pick up pieces

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**'A big gust of wind come up ... and that was it'**

By [Owen Covington](#)

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Larry Kirk had just resumed the restoration of the 102-year-old home at the corner of West Fifth Street and J.R. Miller Boulevard this week.

Paul Houle and his brother had completed renovations to the home behind Kirk's a little more than a year ago.

But both buildings -- one already transformed, the other in the process -- were surrounded by rubble Friday after a storm blew out walls and windows.

"We certainly intend to keep on doing what we're doing," Kirk said of the home, which he plans to convert to a restaurant. "It's probably in a lot better shape than some people's."

Those streets in downtown left open by the Owensboro Police Department were choked Friday morning with the traffic of those making their way through town and those out to survey the damaged homes, churches and other buildings throughout the city's core.

East of the Budget Inn on East Fourth Street, which lost its roof when the storm struck just after 8 p.m., Darrell White had just arrived home to his apartment building when the winds picked up.

"It was rough," White said. "A big gust of wind come up at one time, and that was it."

On the second floor of White's building at 417 E. Fourth St., the wall to one bedroom was so completely blown out that it gave the appearance it had been removed by a carpenter.

Next door, Marian Lanham was aided Friday morning by friends as she moved belongings from inside her brick home that was now missing the front half of its roof. A broken utility pole, held in place by stretched power lines, hung over the home but snapped more than 20 feet in the air.

Lanham received a call from a relative on Thursday night asking her if she was in her basement, which prompted her to seek shelter below.

"I probably wouldn't have gone down there if she hadn't called," Lanham said.

Sidewalks throughout downtown Owensboro were marked with orange spraypainted circles with crosses inside, signs that the homes and businesses had been checked for victims from the storm.

Assistant Fire Chief John Vessels said the Budget Inn property had been condemned because of its extensive structural damage, and no one was allowed back in Friday to retrieve belongings.

Many of Houle's belongings were mixed with cinder blocks, siding and insulation after the north wall of his garage and his

apartment above it collapsed in the storm.

Houle said he had been sitting in a love seat in the apartment that he and his brother renovated more than a year ago when the winds picked up.

"I didn't have time to get nervous or anything," Houle said.

The hail and high winds he saw outside his second-floor living room window sent him for the garage, but he became trapped in the stairway after the air pressure kept him from opening the downstairs door, he said.

"The pressure was too much," Houle said. "I was stuck in the stairwell at the mercy of the wind."

Just south of Houle's home, Kirk sat on the front porch of the two-story home with the wide porch he has been working to transform into a five-star restaurant.

On Friday morning, a tree taller than the home was still propped up on the home's front porch, where Kirk found it when he arrived about 9 a.m.

The front windows of the home had been removed, creating an entry for the wind that blew out other windows on both floors and left a two-story gaping hole in the north wall of the home.

"Basically it just went through the house and blew out the back," Kirk said.