

# Flood of Resilience

The region's largest flood in recorded history galvanized Bragg Creek's community spirit

Article by Dwayne Zaba, Photography by Peter Gold

On the first day of summer, like many of the surrounding communities throughout southern Alberta, the community of Bragg Creek was ravaged by an unprecedented torrent of water that shocked and devastated the locals and left them reeling in its wake.

Within a remarkably short period of time after the water receded, people began to focus on the task ahead, and with an outpouring of help from friends and neighbours within the community, as well as angels from surrounding areas, the indomitable spirit of the people of Bragg Creek truly soared!

In similar fashion to Calgary's own 'Come Hell or High Water' approach, we worked hard to put our lives and community back together. During the weeks following the flood, I met with some of the local business owners and community leaders who went above and beyond the call of duty to help pull us out of the mud.

These interviews will give you a sense of what the people of Bragg Creek lived through: We went through hell and just kept on going!

## Mike Woertman, Cinnamon Spoon

This building was built post-1995 flood, so the elevation is consistent with the new regulations. As the water literally came within inches of the height set out in the new regulations, whoever came up with the new standard really knew what they were doing.

I was here for the entire duration of the flood, as I didn't want to leave the premises. We were up-and-running within two days. The sewer tank filled up with river water that ran throughout this whole area, and it backed up through the main line, depositing about a quarter-inch of sediment all over the floor. So it was really two days of 'shoulder to the wheel' clean-up. As the flood was raging, a lot of people were shocked by the power of Mother Nature.

During the ensuing weeks, I saw a lot of devastated people. The area that was affected was just the hamlet, but many of these residents were hit so hard that it's going to be a while before they come back. I was relatively thankful for my own situation, and very cognizant of others who were in a bad place. The level of support from the people was incredible: It was my proudest moment as a business owner and resident of the Creek, very moving. As I was driving back and forth from home to here, I was passing through all this mayhem, seeing a lot of people just putting out for days. I know these people and I knew what they were giving up to help, but they were doing it all with a smile on their face. This really says something about the people in this area.

I thought Rocky View County really came through for us too. I saw lots of activity and lots of help, with boots on the ground and lots of machinery, doing what they could. I think they went well over and above the call of duty; I really do.



"I'd like people to know that we're open for business"



"The resilience of the people and the power of this community is amazing and inspiring"

Given what we endured, I think we recovered very well – largely because of the level of commitment from the people of Bragg Creek. The volunteers that were running the response centre at the community centre were organized and, once again, I think those people went way above and beyond the call of duty.

I had an opportunity to speak with lots of people from places like Calgary, Cochrane and Okotoks who like to visit the area to partake in the recreational activities it provides – like mountain bikers and hikers. These guys value the area as a place to have fun, and many of them were out here helping out any way they could. It says a lot about what this area means to the people who live outside our community.

I'd like people to know that we're open for business: We'll get through this! And many thanks from the bottom of my heart for all your help.

#### Lori Gildemeister, Bragg Creek Family Foods

Thursday, the day of the flood, I was here until 12:45 in the afternoon. There were no warnings. On Friday we came in here and started to clean up, opening to the public on Saturday. It was gratifying to see the number of volunteers that came out and the caring within the community. We are down 30 per cent in sales since the flood – that would be mostly our tourist revenue. We are desperately missing our tourists, but the locals have been especially supportive and we are really grateful!

This community is wonderful. People have joined hands with people they've never seen before. The amount of caring this community has developed, the camaraderie, is great to see. It's so nice to go outside and talk with people and see them smile. We opened the grocery store quickly because I knew it had to be open: It's an essential service. It would have been much easier to lock the doors and fix everything at once,

but we couldn't do that.

I still have people ask me every day if I need help. People have been volunteering at so many places. The resilience of the people and the power of this community is amazing and inspiring. I'm scared for the future, because I make the money I need to pay the bills in January, February and March during the summer.

I will have to go into debt to stay open through the winter, and that is very difficult. But if the locals continue to support me to the degree that they have so far, I think we'll be okay.

Volunteers from Calgary came out because this is where they like to come out to on the weekends. They came out to help and I'd like to say a big thank you to them. And thank you also to the people of Bragg Creek: I'm so grateful for every cent you spend here.

### Lisa Johnston, ATB Financial

We were only closed for two days. We're still dealing with water in the crawl space, but we just picked up and away we went. Our customers are amazing and fully understanding, because we're all going through this together.

We've been very busy with both personal and commercial customers. Our commercial customers are dealing with low sales volumes. Many businesses have reopened and others haven't yet, but they are all having to deal with loss of business.

I would say 80 per cent of our commercial customers were affected, and about 70 per cent of them have reopened. Some personal customers don't have a home, but they are making the best of a bad situation by remaining positive and, hopefully, seeing light at the end of the tunnel. This community has come together, and the response centre at the community centre was the heart of it all. At the end of a long day of helping each other out, that's where people sat down to talk and to share a meal together.

I worked in the kitchen, feeding the volunteers for four days straight and then part-time afterwards. We all just pulled together to make it work. Everybody just saw what needed to be done and did it. We served over 10,000 meals, and everything was donated from all over Alberta. It was stressful and I pray that we never have to do it again, but I know that if we did, we'd do even better. The donations that were rolling in for food, clothing, bedding and supplies were amazing. What I saw from the volunteers that came from the surrounding communities is that nothing was beneath them. Whatever needed to be done, they did it and they did it with a smile. This instilled faith in our community members that people really cared about us and what was happening here. It was so heartwarming that I really can't say enough about this community: everybody remained so positive despite having lost so much. They didn't focus on their loss, but asked instead how they could help other people.

The people of Bragg Creek are the strongest people I've ever met. I'm concerned about the future because so many of our businesses rely on tourism throughout the summer to get them through the winter, as they make their money during the summer months. So as our businesses open, we really need to support them.

We need to shop local and eat local. Otherwise those businesses aren't going to be here next year, and that's not good for anyone. I also ask people from outside our community to come back.

Bragg Creek is getting cleaned up, and it's still a beautiful place to visit, shop, dine and have some fun.



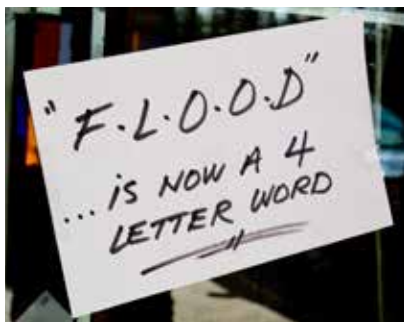
### Mark Betts, Moose Mountain General Store

Bob, one of my employees, and I came in on Thursday, the morning of the flood, and we knew right away this was going to be one serious event. We did as much as we could to lift everything off the floor of the store, knowing that there could be considerable damage and losses.

We had many people coming in looking for sand bags to shore up their property. Within a couple of hours, we had water all around Bragg Creek. Bob and I worked as hard as we could; we even caulked our doors three feet up and sand-bagged the front door. By the time we left, there was over a foot of water outside the store, but there was no water getting into the store yet.

We then left and hoped for the best. The ban was lifted at 8 pm on Friday and we were allowed back into the store. My wife and I worked until 2 am on Saturday, shoveling mud out of the store. That mud is something: You don't easily forget how heavy, sticky and ridiculous it was.

We were closed for 28 hours as a result of the flood, but on Saturday morning we were open and asking people to wipe their feet before they came in! We could see the serious issues people were dealing with, and so we couldn't really say that we had to deal with our own concerns first. People were looking for mops, pales and pump parts so that they could start cleaning up. Although people were coming in with their own problems, they were always asking, "is there anything I can do for you?" We're in Bragg Creek because of the way people are out here – it's an amazing community.



We've had many volunteers coming through willing to do anything to help out: their support was incredible and really appreciated! Also, big thanks to my employees, my wife and daughters. We put in well over 600 hours in nine days to clean this place up. It was important for us to do that because the local people and businesses need us, just as we need them. All the businesses out here are important because we all support and rely on one another. Beyond Kananaskis, it's this community of businesses out here that give people a reason to come to Bragg Creek. So any support I provide, and the support they give back, is what it's all about.

We've worked really hard to open up the store, but there are other people who have worked just as hard and just as long, even longer, who still have a long way to go to get their businesses open and their homes back in shape.

It's an amazing thing to see people hurting, yet still remaining pleasant to deal with: it is inspiring. You can only have an idea of what they are going through: their loss, the damage they have suffered, the clean-up they are dealing with, and how tired they are. Kananaskis is a very important part of Bragg Creek: the trail users, day-use people and campers are all hugely important to the businesses here.

Kananaskis has changed, and people are going to see that change, but the good news is the bridge into Kananaskis opened a couple of days ago. The main message that needs to get out to people right now is that Bragg Creek and Kananaskis are open for business.



Lisa Price, The Italian Farmhouse Ristorante & Bar

The first days after the flood were horrendous. The first day was really quite eerie, just devastating. The second day was lonely, with many people helping over at the main mall as we just sat on our deck thinking, 'How are we going to fix this?'

The third day after the flood, the Sunday, I got here and there were people everywhere. That was what did it for us – just the thought of it gives me goosebumps. Complete strangers from Calgary and wherever else they came from: from heaven, I think! They worked

all day cleaning, shoveling ... it was fantastic, and that was the start of good things for us. We had eight feet of water in our basement, we lost all of our storage contents, our office, our liquor, our food and everything else.

For three weeks, we were here every day. I'm fortunate that my husband is a landscaper, and he and his crew came in and cleared the basement and then started working outside. It was a huge bonus to have him on-board and we also used lots of other local trades: it was a huge effort.



We were closed for three weeks: the longest three weeks ever, but we've had a huge amount of support since we reopened from the locals. But we still need more people to come in. We need people to realize that Bragg Creek is open again: I think that's the key message. I feel like many people think we're gone and don't exist anymore: I've heard lots of those stories. We just need support.

I am quite nervous and apprehensive about the future, thinking what is the winter going to bring? As we all know, we make money out here in the summer to carry us through the quiet winters.

We need to tell people that we are open and doing a great job out here, and that Bragg Creek is as beautiful as ever. There are still many people and other businesses needing help, and we can't forget that. Day to day, people are still suffering, businesses are closed, and we all need to pull together. But we are: I see such strength in everybody helping each other out.

The strength of the people who have been affected, and the way the people who were not affected have come to help, makes me happy to be part of this fantastic community! I want to say thank you to everybody, including people that I've never met before and people that I may never meet again. Complete strangers, coming with their families, with their trucks and trailers, picking up our garbage and our mess ... I'll never forget all their help! So I just want to say thank you: We couldn't have done it without you!

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To all the beautiful people who selflessly gave of their time and donated supplies to help us get back on our feet and rebuild the community of Bragg Creek: Thank you, even though words truly can't express how much your kindness means to us.

The key message the community of Bragg Creek also wants you to hear is: Bragg Creek is open for business.

I feel Sunil Mattu, President of the Bragg Creek Community Association, says it best: "We want to encourage people to keep coming to Bragg Creek. There are some very fantastic businesses here of all different types, run by fantastic people, who are here ready to serve you." ■

### Sunil Mattu, President, Bragg Creek Community Association

The Response Centre opened on Saturday morning, hours after people were allowed back into the community. The Bragg Creek Centre was there for people in their time of need, and the community congregated there. We all have our own ways of dealing with these sorts of calamities in our lives, and one way that people were able to deal with things here was having a place to gather. They knew the community centre was a safe place, and that while they were there they had the opportunity to make a difference for people around them.

I just happened to be the President of the Community Association at the time: In my world there is such a thing as dharma and karma, and together with volunteers we made an amazing difference. We helped each other and we stayed strong throughout.

We will have some challenges moving forward because we suffered through a very traumatic experience. But we are a strong community: We've proven that beyond doubt. In addition to the physical devastation, the emotional impact is real, but I know we will overcome it together.

The volunteers came from both within our community and our neighbors at large: from Calgary, Redwood, down Highway 762, Cochrane, everywhere. We came together as a family to support one another, which enabled us to get to this stage. We have a lot to be proud of, as we stood by each other in our time of need.

We saw the best of people. People really shined. I did run the Response Centre, but I'm humbled as a person by the tremendous response from each and every volunteer and each and every member of our community, who all came together to make this happen for one another.

Rocky View County has also done an amazing job helping us make it happen, with much credit due there. Moving forward we will need each other more than ever, so we must continue to be courageous, strong, supportive of one another, and willing to take responsibility for what still needs to be done. The community of Bragg Creek will be rebuilt, and it will be even better than it was before.



**"The community of Bragg Creek will be rebuilt, and it will be even better than it was before"**

# GOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY

31 White Avenue, Bragg Creek, Alberta  
Peter Gold B.Sc., MPA, SPA



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