

A Flood Won't Stop these Presses...

Grand Forks Herald

Builds Back Better

The *Grand Forks Herald* daily newspaper didn't just report on the "Flood of the Century" that inundated Grand Forks, North Dakota, in April 1997.

The *Herald* struggled for its own survival after the newspaper's offices and printing plant succumbed first to floodwaters and then to a devastating fire that also claimed 10 other downtown buildings. When it was over, the *Herald* had lost the irreplaceable —118 years of photographs, almost as many years of news clippings, and many historic books and documents.

The paper did not, however, lose the will to survive.



Ravaged by fire and flooded by water, the Grand Forks Herald offices lay in shambles in April 1997.

Even before floodwaters receded, representatives from the *Herald's* parent company, Knight Ridder, traveled by boat to see whether anything remained of the newspaper's offices. Most of the complex had been reduced to smoldering ruins.

That day, in a show of faith that Grand Forks would come back, newspaper executives vowed to lead the downtown recovery by rebuilding. They chose the same site, constructing a new building among the remains of two historic portions of the old complex that escaped the fire.

"When we stood up on April twenty-second and said, 'We are going to rebuild,' that sent a signal that is still resounding today," said *Herald* Publisher Michael Maidenber. "The downtown is just blossoming block after block."

Construction began in the summer of 1997 and the offices were completed in July 1998 at a cost of \$3.9 million.

To lessen the impact of a future flood, the main floor of the new building was constructed 1 foot above the base flood elevation. The mechanical and electrical systems now operate from an upper floor, keeping them above potential flood levels. Newspapers and some photos are electronically archived and stored remotely out of state. And in March 1998, the printing operation was relocated to a new 50,000-square-foot building on the western side of the city, far from the floodplain. The plant cost was an additional \$4.5 million.

By design, the downtown offices feature more than the disaster-resistant measures that will better protect it in the future. Several unique architectural features added to the building symbolize the past and the valiant fight to save one city from one flood.

And in a place of honor stands a gold medal—the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for public service awarded to the newspaper for excellence in community journalism after beating nearly impossible odds and continuing to publish daily during the fire and flood, even when its own offices were devastated. The Pulitzer is recognized as journalism’s highest honor.

For the paper that described the Grand Forks fire and flood with the now-famous headline, “Come Hell and High Water,” the decision to rebuild was worth it, Maidenberg said.

“We are proud to have taken a leadership role, but it wasn’t only us,” said Maidenberg. “The historic heart of the community was rescued from oblivion and brought back to life to the credit of all the citizens of Grand Forks. I feel very proud about it.”

In spite of “hell” and high water, Grand Forks is coming back after all.



A new Grand Forks Herald building rises from the ashes a year after the flood.



A historic section of the Herald’s old offices that escaped the fire was incorporated into the new building.
