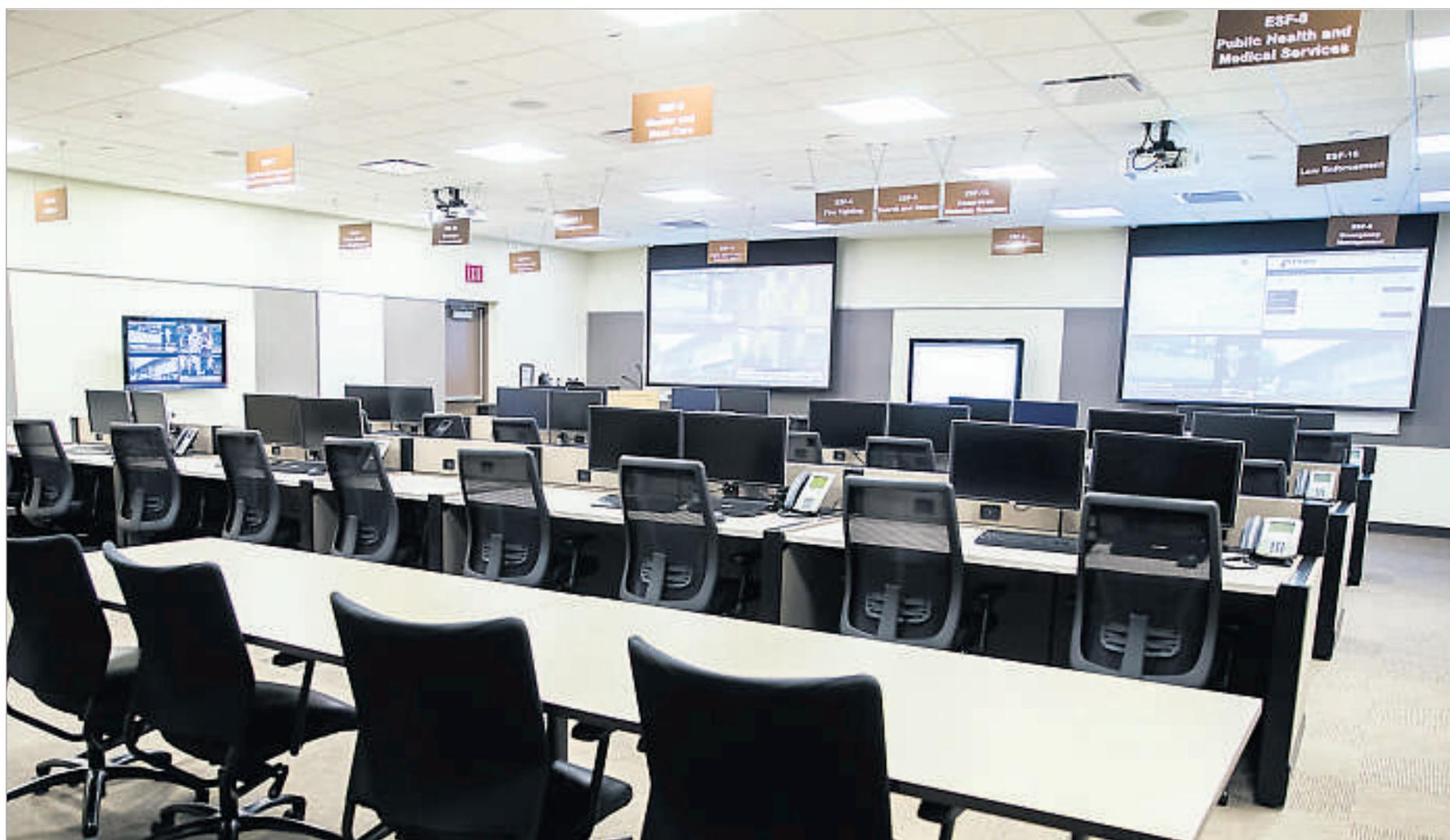


Plano | Murphy | Wylie



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Staying prepared

Plano, Wylie prioritize plans for emergency management 12

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Keeping residents

Plano, Wylie expand emergency management operations, response plans as po

By MEREDITH SHAMBURGER
mshamburger@neighborsgo.com

Wylie isn't the same city it was when the Mother's Day 1993 tornado hit.

At the time, the rural town's population was 8,600. It had a volunteer fire department. Today, the city's population stands at 45,913.

Subdivisions, businesses and schools have since been built on formerly agricultural lands. As it grew, the city added more staff and resources to its emergency services.

Even though Plano was big enough to have full-time fire personnel a generation ago, services have also rapidly developed there. Disaster response is an evolving field and protection is a basic requirement of tens of thousands of new residents.

"I think citizens' expectations have changed," said Wylie Fire Rescue Chief Brent Parker. "They

expect the government to keep them safe."

Dec. 26, residents got their reassurance. Staff from both cities rallied to the aid of tornado-stricken Copeville, Garland and Rowlett.

Dedicating resources

The May 9, 1993, tornado ripped down Wylie's State Highway 78 corridor, killing one person and damaging Physicians Regional Hospital, several other businesses and a mobile home park.

"That was about the time the city was getting its first paid fire chief," Parker said. "It wasn't until three or four years later that the city transitioned to a paid department."

Since that time, Wylie has created its emergency management section within the fire department. They work out of the Public Safety Building, 2000 N. Highway 78, with firefighters, police and the city court.

Plano's emergency operations department works out of the Emergency Operations Center on Parker Road with four full-time staff members and two part-timers. Carrie Little is the department director.

Monitoring severe weather is a big part of their job.

"We know that there are certain conditions that lend themselves to more severe weather," Little said. "When we have weather coming in, we have someone watching that weather — I call it babysitting the weather."

Both cities have a working emergency management plan in case of disaster.

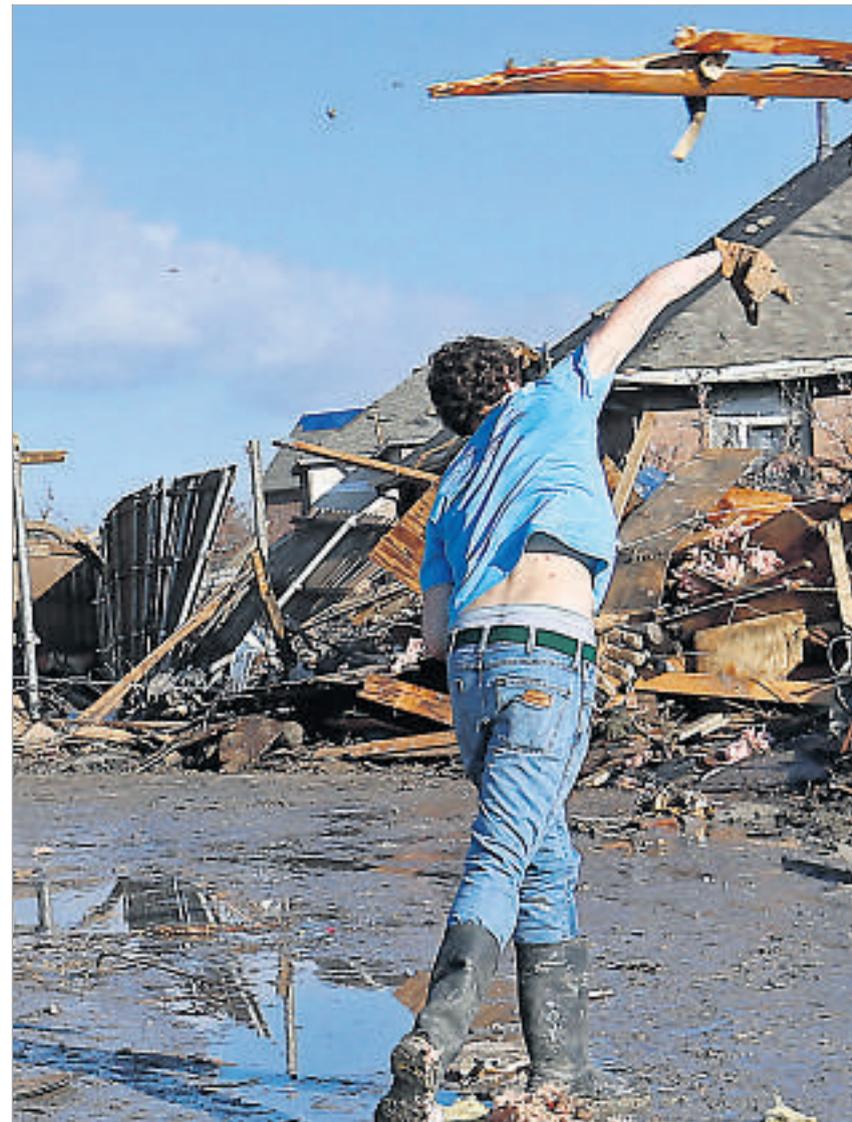
Plano's and Wylie's plans also fit into larger emergency management plans in Collin County and the North Texas region — which is something Parker says really began emerging after 9/11.

Warning systems

When severe weather is about to hit, the emergency management departments decide when and if residents of Plano and Wylie need to be notified.

"I think it's important to note — I think sometimes people don't understand — that with the outdoor warning sirens, they don't sound automatically," Little said. "There's actually a human making a decision to sound those sirens."

Wylie emergency management coordinator Debbie Buccino says her department works in partnership with the National Weather Service. When



Volunteer Marshall Sullivan, 18, of Wylie throws scattered debris in the P
ers from Plano and Wylie also rallied to the aid of tornado-stricken Cope

officials determine severe weather is imminent, Buccino can send out notifications through the city's outdoor warning system, social media accounts and Nixle, a notification website that residents can opt in to.

Plano, too, has a variety of notification tools.

"Warning has to be a layered approach," Little said, "because we can't be reliant on any one single warning system."

Little and Parker noted a common misconcep-

tion: that outdoor sirens everybody. The outdoor war
ed to warn those outside
Parker said. If you're inside
hear them go off.

"For people that want t
suggestion is that they ne
radio," Little said. "That
weather siren."

Buccino says one of the



DMN file photo

Residents of the Glenn Knoll trailer park in Wylie had to rebuild their homes and lives after a tornado on Mother's Day in 1993. Since then, Wylie has better developed its emergency services.

safe

populations grow in both cities



Staff photo by JAE S. LEE/DMN

pebble Beach Drive area ravaged by the tornadoes in Rowlett. City staff-ville, Garland and Rowlett.

are intended to warn ev-ning systems are intend- to seek shelter indoors, le a building, you may not

to hear sirens indoors, my ed to purchase a weather is, in effect, their indoor

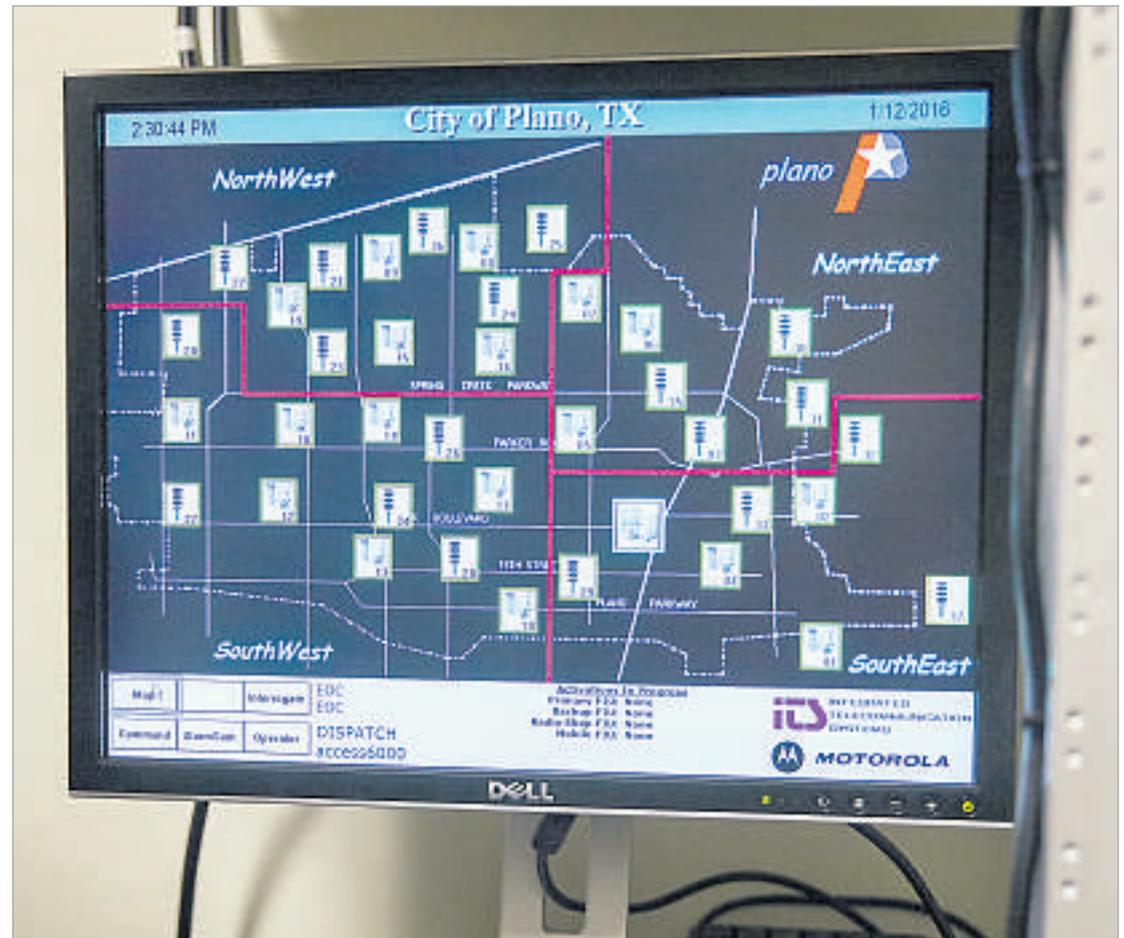
things her department is

focusing on is individual preparedness, whether that's buying a weather radio or making a 72-hour kit, which has water, snacks, hardy shoes and important documents in case of natural disasters.

Residents "have a part in the preparedness," she said. "They need to make sure they're prepared."

Neighbors helping neighbors

Plano and Wylie sent staff members to assist



Staff photo by ASHLEY LANDIS/DMN

A monitor showing storm sirens sits in a control room at the Emergency Operations Center in Plano. It allows experts to monitor severe weather conditions and alert residents.

STAY INFORMED

To keep residents informed about potential severe weather, Plano and Wylie have several warning systems in place: outdoor warning sirens, social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook), Nixle (Nixle.com), TV and radio alerts and cellphone emergency notifications.

with the aftermath of the Dec. 26 tornadoes in Garland, Rowlett and Copeville.

Parker says Wylie sent about 15 firefighters to Rowlett the night the tornado hit, and they helped throughout that weekend. About eight firefighters were sent to Copeville. The city also sent dump trucks.

Plano sent emergency personnel and other city staff, including building inspectors. Little said a big part of the work Plano is helping with is looking at how bad the damage was.

"It truly takes a collaborative effort to begin to assess how bad it is after a storm has come through a community, so we work closely with all of our other neighbors and partners across the region so that no one is an island," she said.

Plano neighborsgo editor Meredith Shamburger can be reached at 214-977-8292.



Staff photo by ASHLEY LANDIS/DMN

Signs indicating where experts sit hang in a control room facility that allows them to monitor severe weather conditions and respond to victims at the Emergency Operations Center in Plano.