

# WHIRLWIND DISASTER RESPONSE



*F4 tornado touching down. It struck the Parsons plant at 2:41 p.m. Advance warning enabled 150 employees to take shelter, escaping serious injury.*

*The worst equipment disaster to ever hit a CINCINNATI customer occurred July 13, when Parsons Company, Inc., Roanoke, Illinois, was struck at 2:41 p.m. by an F4-class tornado.*

Winds in excess of 240 mph leveled every building in the 225,000 sq. ft. manufacturing complex. “It was like the sky falling,” said one employee. Thanks to an early warning, employees were able to get to designated storm shelters, so all 150 miraculously escaped without injury. However, buried under mountains of debris for the large custom fabricator were 21 CINCINNATI machines - five laser systems, 13 press brakes, two shears, and an OBS stamping press.

Chris Buono, CINCINNATI sales engineer, got a call early the next day from Greg Schlink, Manufacturing Support Manager, telling him to hold up shipment on a new CL-707 laser cutting system. “He said all the Parsons buildings were gone,” says Buono, Visiting the site the next day, he says, “The devastation was just mind-boggling.”

Hard on his heels, two CINCINNATI service engineers arrived to see what could be repaired. “They were here right away to help us start making those determinations,” says Schlink.

“It was weird - like an industrial Stonehenge. Press brakes were about the only thing still standing,” says Roger Hannabarger, service engineer. He worked outside for the first two weeks on press brakes. “In 26 years of this work, it’s the first time I ever got sunburned,” he says.

A portable generator was used for testing of the press brakes.

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“Availability of electricity was a real problem,” recalls Schlink. “Each morning we’d meet with Roger on which press brake to try next and hook up the generator.” With such creative jury-rigging and outstanding help from Parsons own maintenance people, four press brakes that sustained the least damage were quickly repaired. “The structurals were OK, but the hydraulic tanks took some hard hits,” says Hannabarger. “Lots of valves just sheared off. Motors were replaced and machines rewired. We’d fix them, then tarp them.

“At the same time, Tonie Polak, laser service engineer, was determining the extent of damage to the more complex lasers. Fortunately, the building they were in had the roof collapse, rather than totally blown off. That helped some to protect the lasers underneath. Two were judged repairable.



*CINCINNATI Laser under tornado debris*

Parsons was able to quickly lease an available facility in nearby Peoria. The repaired press brakes and other machines judged repairable were transferred there and the new CL-707 laser was installed. Within three weeks after the disaster, Parsons was back in limited production, says Schlink.

In the meantime, employees were busy making sure customers weren’t left hanging. Only a week after the tornado, the plant was shipping parts salvaged out of the rubble. Parsons specializes in custom contract metal fabrication and assembly for a broad spectrum of customers, including leading makers of heavy earth-moving, mining, agriculture, forestry and material handling

equipment. "They've been very understanding, but we've also done everything we can to minimize the disruption to their production," states Schlink.



Parsons web site ([www.parsonscorporation.com](http://www.parsonscorporation.com)) features a photo gallery of the tornado damage and clean-up, along with a message of thanks from Parsons employees.

On Aug. 9 a CINCINNATI team - Kirk Strohm, Manager-Service and Parts; Mike Wooten, Regional Service Manager; Hannabarger and Polak - met with Bob Parsons, company president, and Schlink, for determinations on machine repair vs. replacement. Some machines, due to damage and age, weren't judged viable for repair and Parsons ordered new CINCINNATI machines as replacements.

Of the original 21 machines, CINCINNATI in three months had repaired six press brakes, the OBS stamping press, and two lasers, and installed them in the leased facility. By comparison, notes Schlink, it took four months for Parsons just to get a repair estimate on a machining center, which will take another eight months to rebuild back in Japan - a full year till it's back in service.

Hannabarger and Polak were temporarily assigned to Parsons effectively full-time for three months, then are returning as Parsons rebuilds and equipment can be reinstalled. In late November a new replacement laser was installed in a building dedicated to laser and flame cutting operations, along with three existing lasers moved from Peoria. In fact, Parsons had just completed construction on a cutting center building when the tornado hit. The new building was the first to be reconstructed after the tornado.

"We're committed to CINCINNATI equipment," says Schlink. "In our mind, it's the best fabrication equipment you can buy. The investment they put into R&D is just amazing for a privately-held company."

CINCINNATI's service is as strong as its machinery, he noted. "They've never gone to third-party vendors. The way they've stepped up to our disaster certainly reinforced for us that we made the right choice in CINCINNATI."

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Most companies should periodically reinvent themselves. Parsons was forced to reinvent themselves all at once. Everything they wished they could change about their old facility has been revised in their new facility. The new facility is open and well lit. The departments are all efficiently laid out.

Bob Parsons said that much of the business that they had to give up did not come right back. In order to regain sales they had to quote new business. There was a big change from when most of the work was repeat business to now where most of the work is new business. They have adapted to this new environment and have streamlined getting new orders into the shop. The latest tools in programming the CINCINNATI Lasers and Press Brakes have made this possible.



Bob Parsons and Mike Seall, vice President CI.



Press Brake Department