

Never Let a Good Crisis go to Waste

Jackie Sikes, We Love VBC (Van Buren County)

When Mark asked me to speak today and the headliner he gave me is, “A crisis is a terrible thing to waste!” I thought, I must be CRAZY to want to speak about that! **PROP**

C.R.A.Z.Y.

C: creative, courageous

R: resilient, revitalize, rejuvenate

A: always thinking, always moving forward, able to think outside the box

Z: zany, zippy, (you've got to stay energized!, positive!)

Y: YOU! If I can do this, you can too.

We Love VBC has been around for just over a year. We started out as just a couple of people wanting to paint our downtown. We soon learned however, that we needed to involve more people, so We Love VBC was formed. We started with four working teams, Beautification, Economical development, Communications and Marketing, and Hospitality and Appreciation. At our first meeting where we brainstormed on what “gold nuggets” we possessed and how we could stake our claim in Revitalization Breakthrough Solutions asked us the tough question of, “What is your county known for?” the reply was - Natural Disasters.

Van Buren County has had 17 natural disasters to their claim for fame This is well above the national average of 12 storms, floods, tornadoes, fires and we've had earthquakes of 4.7 as our highest on the rector scale

How do you take statistics like these and turn it into a positive community event?

We Love VBC held a community meeting where city council members, county officials, chamber members, business owners and concerned citizens attended. We **ate (very important)**, we brainstormed, we dreamed. **PROP**

Staking claim to being one of the states highest ranking counties for natural disasters isn't going to bring business flocking to our county or move their families in. But why not?

Our emergency crews, police, fire, hospital and first responders are some of the best in the state. I know, you all are thinking you have the best and I'll agree with you, what would we do without them? So I ask, Why again? Because they've had plenty of hands on experience for one, they've been there done that. Van Buren County is one of the safest counties to be in if you are going to be in a natural disaster because they know what to do. We have survived! Been there done that, got the t-shirt. **PROP**

Our communications and Publicity team came up with a way to celebrate our survival! Why not celebrate our survival instead of dwelling on our not so positive image.

We need to celebrate our resiliency to take on whatever mother nature has to hit us with. We also should mention that there or other man made disasters that we have overcome like our main source of employment to our community was our chicken plant which closed down, we've had our fair share of fires and vehicle accidents. One of the worse ones being the logging truck on 65 that recently killed three workmen and injured several other workers many of them residents of Van Buren County.

When disasters hit what did we do?

We came together as a loving, caring community, neighbors helping neighbors. The best way to celebrate this is to join together and share a meal, as friends, as family. So we held our first Survivorfest in August

of 2014.

To add a twist to the event we attempted to break the Guinness World Record for the largest potluck party by hosting a potluck event in our High School gymnasium and auditorium. We fell short of our goal to break the record but had over 400 people attend. That was the largest potluck party I've ever participated in. Notice **we ate** again?

We followed up the potluck with games and informational booths at the park all based on survival games and information on what to do and not do in a natural disaster.

We currently are planning our next Survivorfest without trying to break the world record this time. Our Survivorfest was one of the best “feel good” events our community has held in a very long time. From a community who faces constant challenges from mother nature and man made disasters, we are Survivors and will continue to not only survive but revitalize and rejuvenate a community who knows how to pull together when it really counts.

A crisis is a terrible thing to waste!

Survivorfest is just one of the many events We Love VBC has done to revitalize and promote economical growth in our community.

Town hall meeting “Stake your Claim”

Clean-up

Walk Through with Mural Study

Walk Through with Cromwell Architects (twice)

Potluck-Survivorfest

Grants and Fund raising

Paint the Town

*Market sponsored, window painting, caroling and scavenger hunts

Hot chocolate at football games with East Lab

Second Town Hall meeting - “Get out and Hike, who knows where the trail will lead you.” GORP (good ole raisins and peanuts)

Color Run

8 buildings have been painted
As of today 10 new businesses

If you are sitting in this room today either because it's part of your job to be here or you are here because you want to help your community, then I congratulate you on being just a little bit C.R.A.Z.Y!