“Wichita State & The World: Greensburg Rebirth”

**What did they learn?**
Excerpts of blog entries by Wichita State University students who took part in the project

**MATT HEILMAN**
I’ve heard some crazy stories and met plenty of characters. I was in a comfort zone back in Wichita. Most of what I wrote was sports content for our school paper, The Sunflower. Having to interview people who have lost more than a game has been a humbling experience.

**CANDICE TULLIS**
This experience has been eye-opening.
There’s a lot to living in a bigger town that I take for granted.
Like restaurants. And grocery stores. And Internet.
And yet, my complaints seem petty when compared with those of Greensburg residents. Some are still living in FEMA housing. Some are still trying to settle with insurance. Some have no real home to speak of.

There is still so much to do here in Greensburg, and devoted volunteers and officials are seeing that it is accomplished. I only hope that the media attention doesn't die down too soon. The town needs all the publicity it can get for a few years to keep the ball rolling.

**ASHLEY STONE**
Before coming out to Greensburg, I was hesitant and sort of excited about writing feature stories for this class. I wasn’t sure that I could keep up with the older undergrad students, as well as the graduate students. I was even more unsure of my ability to write four print stories and write and record my first ever audio story. Needless to say, everyone on this trip rallied behind each other and gave everyone the encouragement and inspiration they needed to finish videos at 2:30 in the morning, create the perfect lead to introduce their stories and to capture the perfect picture to assist their stories. I know I found out that I am capable of accomplishing more than I ever thought imaginable for myself. . . . and although I am still hesitant of my writing skills, I am even more unwilling to settle for less.

. . . . Everyone who I have met and interviewed in Greensburg has been positive. From signs on buildings saying, “Struck down but not destroyed . . . rising from the rubble with Christ,” to the senior class motto this past year stating, “We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust our sails,” Greensburg has held their head up high with a positive and upbeat attitude and outlook on the hand they have been dealt. During the commencement exercises, George Bush referenced the senior class growing closer together as the world around them blew apart. . . .There are so many great leaders in Greensburg, such as those who led and still lead by example and those who become leaders simply from their passion, not their position. As I sit at my kitchen table in Wichita, I find myself thinking about Greensburg and ultimately wishing I was there being a part of their positive story.

**TODD VOGTS, who went on to become editor of the Moundridge Ledger newspaper in McPherson County**
GREENSBURG, Kan.—For two weeks I have lived in and around the tornado torn community. It has been as educational as any time I spent in the classroom.

Whether it was flying down dirt roads at break-neck speeds with a local farm hand or sitting in one of the three eating establishments available in Greensburg and Haviland, I have met incredible people who have interesting stories.

My experience covering the rebuilding of the Western Kansas communities devastated by Mother Nature has been invaluable.
I have learned so much about a variety of topics. From a reporting standpoint, I have learned the value of community journalism, especially in the face of a disaster. A newspaper is a constant, something people can turn to when they have nothing else. Without a newspaper, victories over the storm, no matter how big or small, can’t be easily shared. People need to know there is hope. A newspaper is the best way to do that because neighbors can see that their friends are making it, which can inspire others not to give up.

The written word is powerful, and after a town is leveled, words can be something that help the community come back from the calamity.

On a more personal level, I have learned a lot about human nature. It is amazing what people can endure and still keep smiles on their faces and jokes in their conversations.

As Greensburg Mayor Bob Dixon pointed out, Kansas is a special state where people will gladly lend a helping hand to someone in need.

News reports often seem to highlight the seamy underbelly of society, which can make it appear as though its members are cold and uncaring.

That is clearly not the case.

Everyone in Greensburg and the surrounding areas has united to come back stronger than ever, and that makes me look at myself very closely.

What would I have done? Would I be carrying a chip on my shoulder had I been forced to endure what they endured? Would I be mad at the world? Would I be supportive and helpful to others? Would I, as a large rift in the town keenly highlights, want to rebuild the community as it was? Or, would I take time to build in an environment-friendly fashion?

I have many questions, and it will take weeks and months of soul searching to find most of the answers.

The answer to the question I already know is of environmental friendliness. I know that I think going green is a good idea.

Seldom do I admit any sort of hippie leanings, but taking care of the world we live in and finding alternative energy sources in the face of ever-increasing fuel prices is pivotal.

The country as a whole needs to take notes from what Greensburg is attempting to do. Granted, it may not fully come to fruition in the small, Midwest town, but the attempt itself is admirable.

Admirable.

That is the word that best describes everything I have encountered.

The people, the places and everything in between are admirable for what they have faced and are slowly overcoming in an incredible fashion.

Big plans are in place for the community and its members. They will never forget what happened on May 4, 2007, when the EF-5 tornado made history, destroying everything and giving the community a chance to start over from scratch.