On August 25, 2017, Hurricane Harvey made landfall on Texas and devastated the coastal fishing town of Rockport. The following day, the storm moved up the coast and proceeded to drop more than 40 inches of rain on the greater Houston area in just 24 hours. It’s estimated that 19 trillion gallons of water fell on the city by the time the storm moved on.

In Harris County alone, this historic rainfall damaged and destroyed over 136,000 homes and more than 500,000 privately owned automobiles. Thousands of people were rescued from their homes by first responders and volunteers who hauled their boats to Houston from other parts of Texas, Louisiana, and even as far as California, simply because there were people in need.

As the water began to recede and residents began to return to their homes, something amazing happened. As those affected surveyed their possessions soaked in flood waters, groups of people showed up carrying gloves, masks, packing boxes, and sledgehammers, ready to help.

These people were neighbors, co-workers, friends, and fellow church members, but very often they were complete strangers headed to an address where they heard help was needed for what we all know now as “mucking out” a house.

Other volunteers would fill their vehicles with food and water for delivery to work crews – demolition is exhausting work! People took no account of others’ income statuses, race, or political views when deciding whom to help. It’s fair to say that an event like a hurricane can leave people afraid, overwhelmed, and at times, hopeless – but the support from gracious and selfless volunteers will always help pave the path toward recovery.

My parents’ home for the last 42 years ended up with six feet of water running through the first floor. It’s incredible to see what that amount of water does to a home. As we moved their flooded belongings to the front lawn, it would have been easy for my parents to become overwhelmed by the loss and amount of work ahead.

Instead, they handled what had transpired like absolute champs. They rolled up their sleeves and dove head first into resolving the problem at hand.

We had help from many wonderful friends. As a perfect example of the generosity of spirit that prevailed in Harvey’s aftermath, a group of 10 people who had never met my family drove four hours from Dallas to spend a hot Saturday in September demolishing the entire first floor of my parents’ house. And, they did it with a sense of gratitude that comes from being able to lift others up in a time of need. In a word, it was beautiful!

A similar spirit exists within CFMA’s members. I can submit
a question regarding any subject on the Connection Café and receive multiple responses that detail a process, provide lessons learned, or include a valued manual or spreadsheet.

I can pick up the phone and reach out to a member I just met at a meeting or conference, and they will gladly give me 30 minutes of their time to share their experience with a certain product or vendor. And CFMA is able to provide high value programs and benefits to its members and chapters thanks in large part to the dedication and hard work of hundreds of volunteers who serve on committees and task forces.

Our members are always there to help, simply because they want to make someone’s life a little easier and the industry a little better. Following Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, CFMA established a relief fund for impacted members in Texas and Florida. Individuals, chapters, and regional conferences sent nearly $15,000 in donations, in addition to CFMA’s $5,000 contribution.

In my Chairman’s comments at CFMA’s 2017 Annual Conference & Exhibition in Phoenix, I remarked that if your foundation is strong, you will have what it takes to rebuild and move forward – especially in times of drastic and unexpected change. The events following the recent storms in Texas and Florida have demonstrated that firsthand.

As more than two months have passed since Harvey stormed across the Texas gulf coast, life in Houston is returning to normal; the debris piles are being hauled away, drywall is starting to go back in, and people are executing their game plan for recovery.

My hope is that Harvey’s lasting legacy will be for us to continue to remember we’re all neighbors, look out for each other, ask for help when we need it, and give help when we can. This crazy, mixed-up world is a much better place when we move forward together.