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## George Reese Courts reopens after storm damage

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Affordable housing apartments damaged in the April 2018 tornado that hit Meridian re-opened for families this month, with a ribbon cutting Wednesday.

The tornado damaged several homes in the East End area, most notably tearing the roof off the L Building at George Reese Courts, which celebrated the reopening with food and music Wednesday.

"I am more than ecstatic to see this happening. That day... when I came over here, the whole roof (of the L Building) was in the middle of the street," Tyrone Johnson, the council representative for Ward 2, said at the ribbon cutting. "What I saw was people joining in to pull the roof to the side of the road. What we wanted was for the ambulance,

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if it came through here, to be able to get to the people if there was injuries. Within 30 minutes we had this roof over to the side of the road and that just shows how much we can do when we come together as a community."

Johnson and several city representatives joined the residents of George Reese Courts as well as Meridian Housing Authority representatives, including Ronald Turner, the executive director of MHA.

Turner said that 12 families total had been displaced by the tornado

at George Reese Courts, including eight in the L Building.

Families had to temporarily stay at local hotels until vacancies opened up within MHA, Turner said, but within months had relocated to new affordable housing units.

"We were glad because the families who relocated wanted to stay where they were, which allowed us to open these units to take families from our waiting list," Turner said.

Though the ultimate goal for families living in MHA housing is to move

into their own homes, Turner said residents sometimes get a bad reputation.

"But this speaks to the resilience of our residents," Turner said. "They were out here that morning walking on nails, moving lumber, cutting back bushes and doing whatever was in their power to get the community on track."

Still, city representatives and residents fellowshipped and expressed gratitude.

"Things were bad but we were blessed because no one lost their life and we had very minor injuries," Doug Stephens, with the City of Meridian's Public Safety department, said.

"On that day, it was everybody working together," Jason Collier, Deputy Chief of the Meridian Fire Department, said. "That one disaster brought out the best in everybody."