

"The first thought that crossed my mind, after I realized that I was safe [after the tornado], was how precious life is and how little value things truly have," said Dr. Charles Lea, vice president of academic affairs.

Lea was in the Ramer building when the tornado struck. His office, located in the west wing of Ramer, suffered heavy damage.

"Miraculously enough, most of the things that I coveted the most were still there," he said.

"(The tornado) was unlike anything that I have ever been through," Lea said. "The building was shaking and there was a big roar. Then, I heard the sound of glass breaking."



PHOTO BY HOLLY BROWN

Terry Heinen, director of media services, rode the tornado out in the control room of the campus TV studio in the media services suite of the Ramer Administration Building.

"When I got inside the control room, I was the last one in and closed the door and latched it,"

Heinen said. However, the force of the tornado blew the door open. There were about 20-25 people in the control room of the TV studio when the tornado hit the Ramer building, he said.

**"There really wasn't any panic or anything."**

"Everybody was pretty calm, some people got underneath the countertop for a little more safety, but mostly everyone was quiet. There wasn't really any panic or anything,"

Heinen said. "[The control room] is one of the safest places in the building,"

he said. "It's a pretty quiet room. You really couldn't hear the 'freight train' in there."

"It may have been helpful that we couldn't hear because it is such a quiet room," Heinen said.

"We were a few hundred feet from where it hit the [Ramer] building the hardest."

Shortly before the storm hit, Heinen was on the phone.

"I was in my office talking on the phone and all the ceiling tiles blew up in the air and came down and landed in their tracks," he said.

After the tornado ripped through the Ramer building, Heinen said "the fire alarms went off and there was dust in the air. I went out looking for a fire."

However, there was no fire in the Ramer building. But, the building was severely damaged, including the roof near the media

"It truly was a blessing from God that everyone was all right," he said.

Lea credits campus security and the campus' area coordinators with saving the students, faculty and staff serious injury.

"Security had been monitoring the [weather] all day. When it was determined that the school was directly in the path of destruction, we enacted our disaster evacuation plan," he said. "In every building, the disaster coordinators did an outstanding job getting everybody to safety."

Lea's office will be located in the Thigpen Library until repairs can be made on the Ramer building.

services suite.

After determining that there was no fire, Heinen grabbed a video camera and began shooting footage of the aftermath of the storm.

"[The TV studio] got water damage when the roof over the highest part of the building was torn off. That night when the rain came down, we got water damage," Heinen said.

Although he originally intended for the footage to be used for media outlets, Heinen explained that it will be placed into the archives as a documentation of the damage and aftermath of the tornado for future generations at Vol State.


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