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Tad Agoglia is at the ready in times of national crisis Sunday News
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In the Spotlight



Tad Agoglia and the First Response Team of America are

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By LYNN ONDRUSEK
Staff Writer

The First Response Team of America could be seen as a bunch of modern-day superheroes. Its Lancaster-based crew, as the name suggests, is first on the scene at America's natural disasters.

Founder of the nonprofit organization is Tad Agoglia, of Lancaster. By age 30, he was the millionaire owner of a large disaster recovery and cleanup service yet felt unfulfilled with life, he said. He had many questions about what happened in the moments after a storm had ripped through a community.

So he went to Greensburg, Kan., after the town was demolished by an F-5-designated tornado in May 2007.

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"Everything was destroyed, and if anything was left standing, it was beyond repair," Agoglia said.

The turning point came as he watched a woman come from the rubble. He said she walked a few feet, surveying the destroyed town, and after a few moments she collapsed.

"As many came to her aid, tears rolled down my face as I cleared debris in front of the destroyed firehouse, and I realized that I no longer wanted to use my equipment and trucks to make money, but instead to bring a helping hand to communities that had lost everything," he said.

He decided to take what he had in life and what he made from his business to help others from the first day of the disaster.

First Response Team was born.

Hometown: Huntington, Long Island, N.Y.

Age: 35.

Marital status: Single.

Last place helped: West Liberty, Ky. [after a tornado in March].

Other places where First Response has been: Alabama; Arkansas; California; Georgia; Port-au-Prince, Haiti; Indiana; Iowa; Kansas; Kentucky; Louisiana; Massachusetts; Missouri; New Jersey; North Carolina; North Dakota; Oklahoma; Oregon; Pennsylvania; Rhode Island; Tennessee; Texas; Virginia; and Washington.

What do you love about your job? The people we help, and the donors that make it possible to help.

What's the toughest part? The loss of a life. When someone dies and leaves this earth, there seems to be this empty space that is very sobering.

What's the worst scene you've been to? Haiti [after the 2010 earthquake].

What's the greatest act that has been done for you in the field? I was clearing a home site with the team in Ringgold, Ga. The whole family died in the tornado except a few-months-old baby. A distant relative was there and, with tears in his eyes, said, "I don't know what to say except, thank you for clearing this all away. I feel encouraged."

What equipment do you use when helping to clean up? Three Peterbilt Heavy Haul trucks and a grapple truck, two Ram trucks, Pioneer Pumps, Allmand light towers, Caterpillar Skid Steers, Caterpillar Compact Track Loaders, Prentice Loaders, generators, specialized search-and-rescue equipment and hovercrafts.

What has been your most memorable experience in the field? The way communities come together with hope, optimism and perseverance despite the loss. They look ahead to better days and realize nothing is impossible. They inspire me.

How do you pass the travel time? Work phone calls.

Who's your favorite superhero? Wonder Woman.

What's in the back seat of your car? Everything. All the possessions that I have fit into two duffle bags and I bring them everywhere I go.

What do you wish you had more time for? Time with friends, time for snowboarding and time to just be. Time to figure out what I really enjoy in life outside of my charity, and taking the time to do it.

What are your goals for the future? A sustainable charity with talented and good-hearted people passionate toward helping survivors affected by disasters in a very unique way.

What's your favorite place to visit on vacation? I've never had a vacation, but if I had to choose, it would be in the mountains with my snowboard.

Any regrets? Not pursuing a better education. My dream has always been to go to an Ivy League school, and I would love the opportunity to, one day, do that.

Favorite food? If I had to pick just one, it's Asian food. But food is one of my loves ... trying different types, experimenting in the kitchen and enjoying it all with good friends and good wine.

How do you use social media in your job? To give updates on the team, to track the team in the field, to raise awareness and to generate support. Like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter: @firstresponse or [Facebook.com/firstresponseteam](https://www.facebook.com/firstresponseteam).

Any tips for being prepared at home? Put together a plan. Have the basic essentials, and keep it simple.

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