

## West Tennessee Legal Services is almost moved back into its home

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After nine months of being displaced by the May 4 tornadoes, attorneys and victims advocates with West Tennessee Legal Services will return to their downtown Jackson location.

"We wanted to come back downtown," said Barbara Bean, comptroller. "A lot of clients use public transportation, and this location is more convenient."

Beginning on Monday, client appointments will resume at the downtown location, at 210 W. Main St., Bean said. She credits local architect Sammy West with Hart, Freeland and Roberts firm for saving the building after the storm.

"Our building was included on a list of buildings deemed unsafe," Bean said. "We had a structural engineer to verify the building had steel beams and would stand."

Watlington Brothers Construction secured the front of the building with beams to prevent it from falling.

"Saving the building wasn't a long process," Bean added. "We really had wonderful people helping us."

West Tennessee Legal Services represents low-income people and victims of violence and domestic violence, and addresses the needs of seniors and children. Bean estimated at least several hundred people are assisted by the nonprofit agency annually. Community education such as mailings and participation in health fairs also helps numerous people, Bean said.

"We work to affect problems that affect a vulnerable population," said Steve Xanthopoulos, executive director.

The agency relocated to a smaller office on Brentshire Square while its downtown location was under repair.

Returning to the new building has been a slow process for the agency, which began in West Tennessee in 1977. West Tennessee Legal Services has been downtown since 1981.

"We were really cramped in our temporary location," Xanthopoulos said. "Some people had their desks in the hallways, and in some situations, there were three people to an office."

Now equipped with at least 40 offices and two conference rooms, the revamped building will offer more training opportunities.

"Recouping from the storm damage has allowed us the opportunity to upgrade our equipment," Xanthopoulos said. "We lost all of our computer systems in the storm. We had to purchase \$40,000 in server equipment."

Rain water from the storm damaged about 60,000 files held in the office's second-floor storage room.

"Overall we were very fortunate in the tornado," Xanthopoulos said. "We had adequate insurance coverage, and no one in our organization suffered any major loss."

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