



Seeing is Believing



The Kaehne's safe room. Photo by Judy Kaehne

It took a 20-mile drive to her favorite shopping village to convince Judy Kaehne that the hall closet was not capable of providing the protection needed to survive a significant tornado.

In spite of Alabama's tornado history, retired military couple Randy and Judy Kaehne chose to settle in Hartselle, located in Morgan County. During tornado warnings the family would huddle in an interior hall closet. After the storm, they would promise to build a safe room before the next tornado. The promise became a reality following the April 27,

2011 EF-5 tornado that pummeled downtown Cullman, causing extensive damage and at least two deaths.

On the day of the storm, Judy and her two dogs took refuge in the hall closet while Randy was at work.

"I drove through the city of Cullman the week after the tornado touched down. I saw all the damage and devastation," said Judy. "When I got back home, I told my husband, 'You've got to see Cullman.' There was destruction everywhere. It was

unbelievable. It convinced us that it was time to build that safe room."

"My husband went online and researched FEMA's guidelines for building safe rooms. Then he shopped for the best possible prices on the building materials. We built the safe room at a great price," Judy said. "We started the safe room project in May 2011. Working in the evenings only, it was completed in six weeks. It's inside our garage."

Built to specifications outlined in FEMA 320, "Taking Shelter from the Storm: Building a Safe Room for your Home or Small Business," construction cost was approximately \$800. This cost did not include the purchase of a door that meets FEMA's specifications. The Kaehnes received an estimate of \$400 to construct the door.

"I feel confident that we'll be ready for future storms," said Judy.

For additional information, contact the FEMA Safe Room Help Line at 866-222-3580 or at saferoom@dhs.gov. The help line provides information on where to go for help regarding hazard mitigation grants and other grant funding, project eligibility and guidelines for safe room

construction. The Alabama Emergency Management Agency (EMA) also encourages local residents to work with their county EMA director before building a safe room to ensure reimbursement. Visit: www.ema.alabama.gov. Also visit the National Storm Shelter Association at <http://www.nssa.cc>, and www.fema.gov.



Photo of Randy and his son Tim, during the construction of the safe room. Photo by Judy Kaehnes.