Locals band together to help tornado victims

By William White

About 800 people in Tuscaloosa will get the best of what one Auburn food establishment has to offer Wednesday.

The Chicken Salad Chick will load up volunteers and a day’s supply of “The Classic Carol,” its best-selling chicken salad selection, at 7 a.m. so they can serve the hundreds of sack lunches at the Belk Activity Center in Tuscaloosa later that day.

“We are so excited,” said Stacy Brown, who owns the restaurants with her husband, Kevin Brown. The Browns are part of broad local efforts by the business community, churches and local agencies helping communities ravaged by the tornados that struck the state last week.

“We are going to take all of our chicken salad that we would cook for the day to Tuscaloosa,” she said. “And we are going to serve 800 lunches.

“There are so many times you want to give, like to the earthquakes and things like that, and we think this is our time.”

She said her employees and neighbors have volunteered their time to prepare the food and travel to Tuscaloosa. Her two sons, Jack and Carson Evans, will also be along for the experience.

The couple’s two restaurants at 555 Opelika Road and at 1611 S. College St will be closed for business Wednesday for the trip to Tuscaloosa.

Stacy said the idea to help struck the couple at the same time.

“We were walking to dinner on Friday night and I said, ‘Kevin, I really want to go to Tuscaloosa.’ He said, ‘I’m so glad you said something. I have thought the same thing. Let’s do it.’”

She said they contacted the employees and did all the planning over the weekend.

Other efforts
The Auburn-Opelika Tourism Bureau and the Auburn Chamber of Commerce collected more than 40,000 pounds of donations which were taken to Tuscaloosa Saturday,” wrote Robyn Bridges, Auburn and Opelika Tourism Bureau, public relations and communications director, in an email calling for volunteers to help with sorting and packing Monday.

Auburn Chamber of Commerce President Lolly Steiner, co-worker Stephanie Calhoun, Renate Robinson and John Wild with the Auburn and Opelika Tourism Bureau were still busy sorting, boxing and loading supplies Monday morning to be taken on a truck donated by Two Men and a Truck to Rainsville in north Alabama near Fort Payne.

Auburn University is also organizing volunteers and serving as a drop-off point for relief donations.

On campus, there will be 25 to 30 volunteers sorting, boxing and loading supplies throughout the day through Wednesday at the Ham Wilson Livestock Arena on Donahue Drive in Auburn. Items sorted and stacked Monday will go on a small Auburn University trailer to be taken were those items are needed most.

“We have the capacity to deal with whatever comes in,” said Susan McCallister with Auburn University Public Safety and Security. “We are coordinating with State EMA and other relief groups to organize donations and ship to areas most in need.”

AU and the Lee County EMA are using the livestock arena as a staging point in their effort to collect needed supplies from Auburn, Opelika and other parts of Lee County to be shipped to communities impacted by the tornado outbreak.

Donations can be made from 7 a.m. to midnight through Wednesday at the arena, located at 650 S. Donahue Drive.

“Some of the biggest needs are for baby care supplies, especially Pedialyte; personal hygiene items; non-perishable food; and first-aid supplies,” McCallister said.

With inclement weather expected Tuesday, plans to take Auburn University student volunteers to help in recovery efforts have been moved to Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

“Auburn University Emergency Management personnel and the Division of Student Affairs are working to organize day trips that will allow Auburn students to volunteer their time to help storm victims,” said Chance D. Corbett, associate director of the Department of Public Safety and Security/Emergency Management at Auburn University. “These day trips will be scheduled to leave the Student Center at 7 a.m. and return no later than 7 p.m.

“We encourage you to participate in a day trip once you have completed your final exams,” Corbett said in an email to students. “Volunteering to help will not excuse you from final exams.”

He said bus transportation will be provided to volunteering students, as well as lunch, snacks, drinks and necessary equipment like gloves and eye protection.

In Opelika, the first trailer load from Trinity United Methodist Church went to Eclectic and Cordova, according to an email from the Opelika Chamber of Commerce.

Trinity will be accepting donations of supplies for the foreseeable future. The drop-off point is Trinity
UMC Christian Life Center, 800 Second Ave. in Opelika. For more information call the church office at 334-745-2632.

The church says there is an immediate need for bottled water, power bars, breakfast bars, Gatorade and non-perishable food.