If fiber is a food that gives strength to our physical well-being, then community fiber represents a coming together that brings strength to the meaning of those who live together in that entity.

Once again the miracle of “community osmosis” proved its reality in the small towns of our county during this past week’s storm recovery experiences.

I was raised in a small village where people would collect money for a family that lost their home to a tragic fire before the firemen had the fire extinguished. When someone came home after a hospital stay, cars would line the driveway with people bringing food and supplies to the family that was affected. I have always been proud of the way the small towns in my life have stepped up to take care of their own during difficult times.

What made last week’s storm experience so unique was the fact that it wasn’t one or two families in the community hurting. It was everyone in the community helping each other through each other’s tragic experience.

One person lost a roof; others had a tree fall on their car; others lost siding from their homes and all were without electricity and the inconveniences that went with that.

The closest memory I have for comparison was the 1965 Palm Sunday tornado that ripped through our community of Berne, Ind. and left us without electricity for two weeks. That storm hit at 8:30 p.m. that fateful night and by 10 p.m. cleanup had already started, the same night.

I was in Parkview Hospital with church members Friday afternoon, June 29, when the storm hit. I watched the swirling hurricane winds roaring through the grounds at Parkview when I heard that Payne was under a direct fire tornado warning.

It took me a long time to get out of Fort Wayne and check on my loved ones because of

dodging trees and working with traffic lights that weren't operating as I tried to make my way out of the city.

What impressed me the most when I arrived in Payne was not the unimaginable devastation, but it was the way residents were already gathering together to help each other dig out from under the fallen trees, wires and other damage.

No one was working alone; where one was trying to clear a tree from a home, driveway or street, several were gathered.

The Payne Fire Department had already pulled out its equipment and was preparing for emergencies in what became "Mother Hen Care."

With everyone totally without electricity, Mayor Terry Smith and Fire Chief Jamie Mansfield became proactive beyond the call of duty. Within a day, a huge truck load of ice arrived to be available at the fire station to distribute.

Next came 24-pack cases of bottled water, also available for distribution.

The word was spread that any resident was welcome at the station for a cooling station.

By noon on Wednesday, an all-out effort was being put forth to take care of the village. Firemen brought out grills and began to barbecue hundreds of hamburgers, hot dogs and ground sausage for people to eat.

Payne residents who were overwhelmed by the reaching kindness of their fire department, began bringing in food. They brought in casserole dishes, fruit and other contributions for a total community-wide carry-in meal.

That was the beginning of a unified food giveaway that was available for all meals Wednesday evening, Thursday and through Friday noon when most of the power was restored.

Cold drinks were always available, ice was always available, and the fire and local EMS remained staffed 24 hours a day through the crisis until Friday evening.

People gathered at the station and visited, kept up on the latest reports, asked questions and were kindly instructed by members of the department about the best thing to do in all phases of the crisis.

Although no serious situations developed, several town residents, especially the elderly, were treated for mild heat exhaustion in the ongoing cooling center.

In the meantime, power company workers braved the boiling heat to work on the lines and feverishly do all that they could to restore electricity to all residents of our county.

Personally, I slept in several beds, first at home, then with our son and daughter-in-law, Jason and Cindi, in their cottage at Crooked Lake near Angola and finally the last several days with daughter, Julie, in Fort Wayne.

In the meantime, our third caretaking child, Sandi, asked her mother, due to certain health needs, to spend the remainder of the outage with her in Chicago. At one point, I joked about running a “midwest taxi service” to keep our family connected and well.

On the way home from Chicago late Friday night, Joyce made a suggestion.

She said, “Jim, you know the program, ‘Storm Stories’ on the Weather Channel? Why don’t we have a carry-in dinner at the church and have a “Storm Stories Sunday?”

I liked it and so we are going to have our Storm Stories Sunday in a couple of weeks. Each person will be telling their own story over a good church meal.

We will enjoy the fiber of the food while we appreciate the real fiber of community family and the “Mother Hen” fire department that was so nurturing to us during this crisis.