

# Connected during disaster



RICK GERSON/GETTY IMAGES

Debris litters the ground at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., after a tornado ravaged the area on Feb. 5. The tornado was part of a line of storms that ripped through Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Kentucky.

## Scottsdale firm keeps phones humming through Tennessee tornado

By Jane Larson  
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

The Valley's reputation as a haven from tornadoes, earthquakes and floods paid off recently for customers of a small Scottsdale company.

Telesphere, which manages Internet telephone service for small and midsize firms, kept a warehouse some 1,500 miles away in Memphis, Tenn., connected throughout the tornado that ripped through that city Feb. 5.

Not only that, Telesphere's phone service also survived a fire sparked by cleanup crews in the same warehouse six days later.

"It's clearly unique to have somebody hit by both a tornado and a fire," Telesphere Chief Executive Officer Clark Peterson said. "For the most part, the problems are the common ones to telecommunications, like when an office loses power or a T-1 line goes down."

The 20,000-square-foot warehouse was one of seven nationwide run by Warehouse 86, which stores



### KEEPING THE PHONE LINES OPEN

Warehouse 86 (left), an online-auction storage facility in Memphis, Tenn., was able to maintain communications through a tornado and fire, thanks to Telesphere's technology.

goods for Memphis-based online-auction site Bidtopia.

Warehouse 86 evacuated the Memphis location several hours before the tornado hit, Director of Information Technology Joseph King said.

The next day, with the building torn apart, King's staffers bought pay-as-you-go cellphones and used them to access their office phone lines.

"We didn't lose a single voicemail

message, and we literally lost no time between the tornado and business," King said.

Their warehouse was further damaged when crews clearing rubble accidentally ignited a rubber mat.

The phone system kept working through both disasters because Telesphere doesn't rely on PBX equipment, the switchboard gear that

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## Scottsdale firm keeps phones connected in disasters

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businesses traditionally use to route phone calls to employees' extensions.

Telesphere specializes in Internet-based phone service hosted out of two locations in metro Phoenix. All Warehouse 86's calls still came in to the Phoenix platform, Peterson said.

Some of the company's em-



Clark Peterson

ployees had their phones set to ring on both their office lines and their cell-phones, giving them the ability to answer either one, Peterson said. The rest just had to give Telesphere their alternate phone numbers to turn on the

service, he said.

"Phoenix is a great place for us to be," Peterson said. "There's probably not a safer place to have a centralized platform."

The Memphis tornado was part of a line of storms that ripped through Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Kentucky the day of the Super Tuesday primary elections. At least 22 people died in the storms.

Avoiding that kind of violent weather is why a number of high-tech companies have set up operations in metro Phoenix in recent years.

They are attracted by the stable weather and terrain that allows them to keep critical computer operations running day in and day out.

In the Scottsdale Airport, those safety-seekers include shipping giant DHL, which has one of its three data centers

here, and i/o Data Centers, which houses backup computers for a variety of corporate clients.

Demand for its services is fueling growth at Telesphere, which has business customers in 44 states.

Peterson said the company expects to triple its workforce this year from the current 40 employees and triple its space when it moves out of its downtown Scottsdale location.