

A RIVER Ran Through It

OD rebuilds after Amite River flood left four feet of water in her office



Cynthia Baker, OD, has practiced on the same street in Denham Springs, Louisiana, for the past 34 years. She started in the office as an associate, and a few years later, she bought the practice and has been in the same office building since she had it constructed in 1995. Last year, “it was 21 years old and needed a color change,” she says. “It didn’t need a wrecking ball—but I got one.”



Dr. Baker

She’s referring to the terrible flood that hit town on Aug. 12, 2016, when a rainstorm flooded the Amite River. “There was between four and five feet of water, and it stayed for several days,” Dr. Baker says. “I saved my diplomas and about half of my charts, but we lost pretty much everything else.”

While Dr. Baker was letting the devastation sink in, she didn’t even know that the revival of her office had already begun. By the time she got to her office, staff, family and friends had started the clean-up

process. Dr. Baker’s nephew had brought along family friend, **Danny Marks**, of the Marks Group, LLC, construction company. “I’m so grateful to Danny and his team, who just showed up and started working,” Dr. Baker says. “I never had to hire anyone. He is truly an angel—his halo and wings don’t fit in my building. He got me from cement and studs to seeing patients in seven weeks.” Her office was the first business to reopen on the street.

Dr. Baker found inspiration for her new office design from the Bartlesville, Oklahoma, practice of **Emily Bussey, OD**, whose story ran in *Women In Optometry*. “I looked at many different offices to pull ideas, and Dr. Bussey was extremely kind when I contacted her. She sent me all names of her paint colors and her wallpaper,” Dr. Baker says, adding that she was able to secure every last roll of the wallpaper that the manufacturer had at a discounted price. Dr. Baker had to move quickly on making decisions on all of the details from flooring, paint, light fixtures, doors and knobs because the team rebuilding her office was so efficient it had her back to seeing patients on Oct. 3, 2016, just seven weeks after the flood.



The practice is light and airy.

All of the details fell into place, creating a space that patients regularly describe as soothing and calming.

The office doubled its number of exam rooms from two to four, relocated its lab and added a pretest room and a private office. They started from scratch on instrumentation. Her staff ordered the computers and phone systems, and a month after the flood, Dr. Baker and her daughter, **Celeste Baker DiCarlo, OD**, attended Vision Expo West for some equipment deals. They brought home a 3D OCT Maestro, an OCT and retinal camera all in one from Topcon Medical



Dr. Baker had plans for remodeling her office; a major flood sped up the timeframe.

Systems, and they were lucky enough to win a ClearChart digital acuity system from Reichert Technologies.

The devastating storm didn’t receive the press coverage that Hurricane Katrina did, but Dr. Baker says that many of her patients are still affected by loss a year later. She encourages her colleagues to be proactive in defending themselves from flood, fire or tornado. “It’s hard to protect yourself from these tragedies,” she says. Invest in flood insurance—she’s glad she did—and frequently back up computer systems, she recommends.

Dr. Baker says that she’s surprised with the volume of patients who have been coming through her doors since she reopened. “I thought we wouldn’t be busy because people would be concentrating on getting their lives back together or wouldn’t have the financial means to come in,” Dr. Baker says. “But we are so busy, and it’s such a blessing. It’s the opposite of what I expected.” | **WO** |

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See Dr. Baker’s story at goo.gl/dJvNAo or visit The Physical Space under Models of Practice on womeninoptometry.com.