

## Dewberry aided Louisa earthquake mobilization response

**T**HE 5.8-MAGNITUDE earthquake that struck the East Coast last August was the second strongest one in Virginia history. The epicenter of the quake, which was felt from Alabama to Canada and as far west as Chicago, was only five miles from the Town of Mineral in Louisa County. The shaking earth caused unprecedented damage in the county, with a number of buildings affected, including six schools. Louisa County High School and Thomas Jefferson Elementary School sustained such severe damage that both were closed indefinitely.

In September, recognizing the importance of having a structural engineer evaluate the damage, the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) tasked the consulting firm Dewberry with assisting in the preliminary assessment of the school buildings. Because it had completed an evaluation of the buildings not long before the quake, Dewberry possessed an excellent frame of reference to perform an evaluation.

As a result of the significant damage outlined in the September evaluation, and given the need to provide sufficient documentation and cost estimates to qualify for federal support, county officials turned to Dewberry again the following month. A more detailed damage assessment was needed in just two-and-a-half weeks. The firm dispatched a team of experts that accomplished the task and produced a comprehensive report that met the standards of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

In less than 24 hours, the Dewberry team began its assessment alongside VDEM representatives. Soon, a cadre of architects and structural, civil, mechanical/electrical, plumbing, and fire protection engineers were on site, mobilized from the firm's offices in Richmond, Fairfax, Danville and Raleigh. In addition, staff members from Dewberry's emergency manage-



**Dewberry was instrumental in assisting Louisa after the quake.**

ment and disaster mitigation practice, who were experienced with addressing FEMA disaster application requirements, were on hand.

The damage to the Louisa County buildings was estimated at more than \$31 million. Dewberry completed the report and submitted it to the county, which worked with VDEM to submit a formal request for a disaster declaration to Gov. Bob McDonnell's office. McDonnell, in turn, submitted the federal disaster declaration request by the Oct. 22 deadline. FEMA approved the request in early November, ensuring that the county would secure financial assistance for infrastructure repairs – and replacement of the two schools – as well as debris removal and related emergency services.

Dewberry also assisted Louisa County Public Schools with development of a modular high school campus to accommodate students temporarily. The firm worked closely with the school division to select a site and modular classroom vendor in addition to creating a set of engineering plans quickly. As a result, the county opened the modular campus in early February, less than six months after

the earthquake. The firm continues to provide on-call support in response to aftershocks, several months later.

“Dewberry was able to quickly mobilize a multidiscipline team of engineers and architects to investigate earthquake damage and turn around a comprehensive report,” said County Attorney Dale Mullen. “The firm's reports were instrumental in meeting our tight deadline and obtaining a major disaster declaration from FEMA. Louisa County is now poised to receive public assistance grant funding that will go a long way toward the repair or reconstruction of the two schools.” 

### **About the firm:**

*A VML sustaining member, Dewberry was established in Arlington in 1956. It moved its headquarters to Fairfax County in 1965.*

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