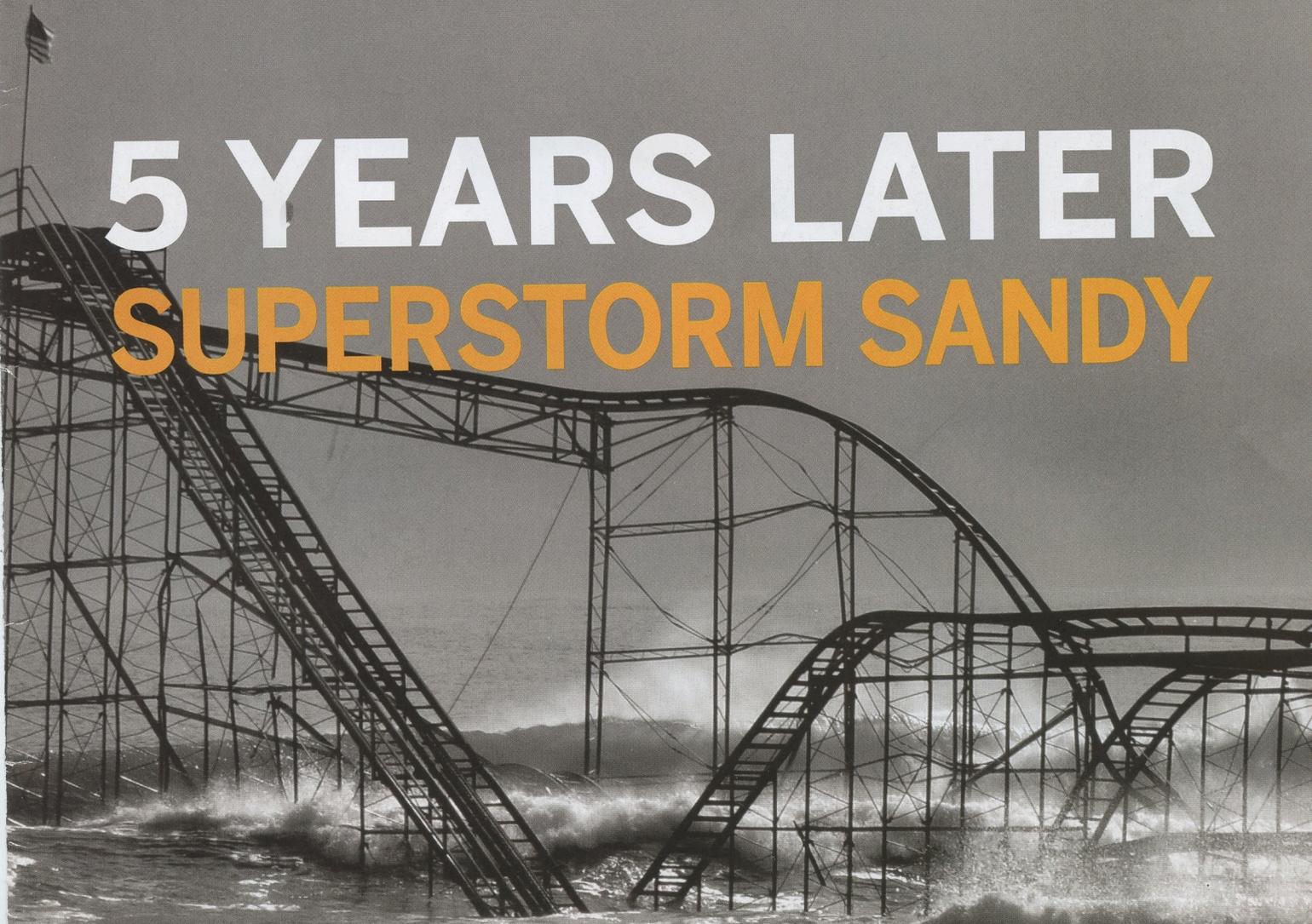


# NEW JERSEY REALTOR<sup>®</sup>

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## 5 YEARS LATER SUPERSTORM SANDY



# A State Restored

WHEN IT WAS TIME TO TALLY THE LOSSES, OFFICIALS ESTIMATED THAT SOME 346,000 HOMES IN THE STATE HAD BEEN DAMAGED OR DESTROYED. GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE ESTIMATED THE ECONOMIC COST OF THE STORM AT \$36 BILLION.

FOR THOUSANDS OF NEW JERSEYANS, THE DISASTER WAS PERSONAL.

WRITTEN BY **EILEEN MOON**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **COLLEEN KING OLIVER**



*It's not one hundred percent, but overall, the area has recovered from the storm.*

There's little doubt that the state of New Jersey has come a long way since Superstorm Sandy slammed ashore five years ago. When the storm hit on October 29, 2012, whole communities along New Jersey's 130 miles of coastline were swallowed up and spit out into the ocean.

Flood waters inundated basements, halted public transit, and scattered yachts and cabin cruisers around shore towns like plastic tub toys.

"People were unprepared financially to take the hit that Sandy leveled," says Peter S. Reinhart, director of Kislak Real Estate Institute at Monmouth University.

Of the nine counties declared eligible for federal disaster aid, Monmouth and Ocean counties were the hardest-hit.

"The impact of the storm on the real estate market was hyper-local," says Tom Wissel, of the Ocean County Board of Realtors®.

"Right after the storm, we saw an upsurge in the markets, especially in the adult communities. People were making what I call "lifeboat" purchases – choosing to buy a home in a retirement community rather than hunt for a long-term rental while they waited for their home to be habitable again. The inventory of homes in the retirement communities just disappeared."

Owners who chose not to rebuild – or couldn't afford to – put their properties on the market. And buyers took advantage of the opportunity to rebuild bigger and better.

If the property was selling in the \$300,000 range prior to Sandy – lagoon property on the mainland of

Barnegat Bay, for example, Wissel said – the next people to buy it would rebuild on pilings, with home values jumping to the \$500,000 range.

"There's a lot of real estate on the Jersey Shore that has never looked better," says Jeffrey Macpherson, a Broker Associate with Heritage House Sotheby's International Realty in Shrewsbury. "Sandy kissed several towns that have never looked as good as they look now."

But some buyers worry about living in towns hit hard by Sandy.

"Everything that Sandy did to us is a concern for the resale value of that building," says Macpherson. "The water that came in with Sandy and the evil moisture it left behind has been our biggest problem. It's certainly a topic in every shore town."

Business owners were also dealing with the wrath of Sandy.

Tim McLoone, owner of 10 restaurants throughout New Jersey, had three restaurants knocked out of business by Sandy. McLoone's Rum Runner in Sea Bright was the most heavily damaged.

Rising waters from the Shrewsbury River inundated the downstairs bar and dining room to a depth of five feet.

"It was a total loss," McLoone says.

After the shock wore off, he and his wife Beth decided to muster the resources they'd need to rebuild.

He credited Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno with connecting them with the Economic Development Authority to obtain funding for rebuilding. They

also received a loan from Investors Bank and some help from their builder, Martin Company, which deferred payment on the remainder of their invoice to help the McLoones get the restaurant up and running.

Re-opened in 2016, the new Rum Runner stands some 15 feet above the river. The elevation was designed to protect the restaurant from a future storm of Sandy's caliber, but it is an additional benefit, McLoone says. "It provided us with incredible vistas and tremendous views that we never had before."

In Highlands, a \$2 million Streetscape project is dressing up a downtown ravaged by Sandy five years ago.

"That has made a unique impact," says Carla Cefalo Braswell, president of the Highlands Business Partnership.

There has also been a surge in new businesses, including a waterside restaurant, the Baypointe Inn, just next door to the newly reconstructed Sandy Hook Bay Marina. In the downtown area, an Italian restaurant, Il Lago, and several small businesses have re-energized the community.

"They're actually purchasing the properties," Braswell says. "So they're in it for the long haul."

In Long Branch, beach replenishment is helping to spur development, notes Reinhart. Two high-end condominium projects—the Lofts at Pier Village, with

unit costs ranging from \$500,000 to \$2 million and South Beach, with units ranging from \$1 to \$5 million are in progress.

"The people are coming back to the beach," says Wissel. "I grew up a block from the ocean and would be hard-pressed to get that ocean out of my blood. There's an appeal to living in a resort community."

"There's still work to be done," says Wissel. "It's not one hundred percent, but overall, the area has recovered from the storm."

Macpherson agreed that people are often able to overlook the damage Superstorm Sandy left behind.

"When I stood in a destroyed Sea Bright – you turn your back on the destroyed buildings and look at the ocean. The water still has an allure. People will still come down here on a sunny, summer day."

"Overall, Sandy-affected areas have largely come back," Reinhart says. "Summer rentals are good. The fabric has changed, but it's still the Jersey Shore." ■

