

# Shelter From The Storm



Top photo: Don Guymon being interviewed by a St. Louis television station crew.  
Bottom: A Safe Shed in the process of being installed.

Neighbors, children, and curious onlookers gather to see what has come. They marvel at the efficiency as one person installs "it." The item is a Safe Shed, a twelve-ton storm shelter that saves lives, which is designed and manufactured in Salem, Ill., by **Don Guymon '74**.

Safe Sheds Inc. was founded in 2002 after Guymon, and his wife Betty, viewed the devastation of a tornado that had passed through nearby Centralia. He took on the challenge to design a storm shelter that was affordable, attractive, easy to install, and also served as a storage shed. Consulting with wind engineers from Texas Tech University and the National Storm Shelter Association, the resultant design was compliant with the requirements for safe rooms and storm shelters as detailed in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) publication, *Taking Shelter from the Storm: Building a Safe Room for Your Home or Small Business*.

Guymon's sheds are designed to withstand effects of a 250 mph wind, an EF5 tornado. He originally began production of the storm shelter on his farm near Kinmundy, twelve miles northeast of Salem, but he eventually moved manufacturing to Salem, where it remains today.

Safe Sheds are composed of a reinforced steel framework around which is poured concrete. The structures are built in two sizes, 6' x 6' and 8' x 10'. The larger size is by far more popular with consumers, and in military application many 50 soldiers have been squeezed into a 6' x 10' structure.

The shelters have been installed in more than 20 states, and more than 900 units have been placed on military bases including Fort Sill (Oklahoma), Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri

and Guantanamo Bay (Cuba). According to Michelle Barbee '89, head of marketing and finance for the business, "When a Safe Sheds truck pulls up to a delivery location, we always cause a stir and have customers and neighbors overseeing the installation with cameras and video recorders. The delivery equipment is unique, and it's a very impressive process that allows one man to unload and install a 24,000 pound storm shelter in someone's yard or on their business property."

Guymon's degree from Southern is in agricultural sciences, and though he has no formal training in engineering, his designs have proven beneficial for the business. Barbee says, "All of the installation equipment and equipment used to move the shelters around the manufacturing floor were customer designed and built by Don. He has also designed and built the

concrete forms that are used to pour the concrete storm shelters. Given a piece of paper, a pencil, and enough free time to work it out, there isn't much he can't design and then build."

When the business began in 2002 on Guymon's farm there were few employees, and he did the delivery and installation himself. Today the business has income of more than \$1.5 million per year, and sales have steadily increased over the past 13 years. Safe Sheds employs 16 people, including two delivery and installation drivers. The company recently was selected as the Salem Business of the Year by the Greater Salem Area Foundation and the Salem Chamber of Commerce.

Guymon underscores the modest lifestyle of his student days at Southern by recalling, "When I started at SIU in 1962, I didn't have money to socialize or eat out much. At

that time, it was a big deal to have enough money to walk to McDonald's and have a 15 cent hamburger. When I returned in the early '70s to finish my degree, I was commuting from Salem to Carbondale.

Guymon soon recognized the advantage of membership in the SIU Alumni Association. "One of the best things I did immediately after I graduated was become a lifetime member of the Association," he says. "I did it largely because it gave me a library card for Morris Library that I could use forever. Trips back to Carbondale, for years, involved either a performance at Shryock Auditorium or a stroll to the library to look up information and books I couldn't access any other way.

"It was always good to take my child along on those trips, too, and it paid off. Both my daughter and son graduated from SIU."



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