



2015 Chrysalis Awards Entry: Commercial Insurance Restoration  
Valley View School – “Valley View Strong” BELFOR Boston



“This is the beginning of our recovery. We may have lost some buildings, but we have not lost our spirit<sup>1</sup>,” said Rick Bulger, the Associate Director of Valley View School in a letter to parents of students.

On Friday, October 25, 2013, a devastating fire broke out around 7:00pm which severely damaged a major dormitory, student lounges, kitchen and dining hall-theatre on campus. The academic facilities, gymnasium and other dormitories were not affected. Luckily, there were no student or faculty injuries and everyone was accounted for, however, while everyone was physically safe, there laid several daunting tasks ahead of them – how to 1) keep the school operating with limited interruption 2) continue to educate and inform the unique student body and 3) rebuild their beloved campus buildings to their original historic splendor in the shortest amount of time possible.

According to the website<sup>2</sup>, Valley View School is a small, private boarding school that provides a year-round therapeutic environment for boys between the ages of 11 and 16. Located a mile and a half from the rural, central Massachusetts town of North Brookfield, Valley View School provides an ideal setting for experiencing a wide variety of wholesome and stimulating activities. The school prides itself in offering a comprehensive program integrating a range of services: educational, psychotherapeutic, medical and recreational, in order to allow each student to reach his greatest individual potential.

Once the smoke cleared and the North Brookfield Fire Department crews declared the fire under control, it was time for BELFOR, New England’s premiere damage restoration company to get to work. The project would have two main phases: first the restoration and second the ground-up (or “hill-up”) reconstruction.

School started again the very next Monday although some adjustments had to be made. Valley View School was able to find temporary housing at a nearby school for the boys whom were misplaced by the fire. The temporary kitchen was housed in the gymnasium and was still able to produce three meals each day! The fire inspector handled the investigation and the demolition of the fire-damage dormitory could commence.

Valley View School's campus consists of historic farm structures that date back to the 1830s. The main building affected by the fire was 10,000 SQ FT with many complexities. Of course, trying to maintain the historic architecture of the buildings was of the utmost importance. Another issue that had to be addressed was that although it was a historic property, it had to be brought up to current building codes. Environmental considerations such as the removal of asbestos containing materials and the underground oil storage tank required BELFOR's expertise and assessment. All but one of the damaged structures had to be demolished and rebuilt. The rebuild would accommodate more space, add more rooms, an office and student lounges to increase the school's future capacity to serve a larger student body.

Some of the biggest challenges during the reconstruction had to do with the actual landscape of Valley View School's campus. The main building was originally built into a steep hill as a barn on a working farm and the on-site work required excavation and removal of sub-standard. BELFOR had to remove hundreds of cubic yards of soil, bring in new fill, compact the fill until the engineer approved it for slab and foundation placement. Additionally, the water and sprinkler system supply had to be installed from the street 400 feet away...and uphill!

In addition to overcoming the difficult site conditions, the greatest challenge faced by the reconstruction team was the compressed timeline required to complete the project before financial resources to temporarily operate the school would run out.

BELFOR was able to bring-in an engineering and design team, local sub-contractors and material providers to support their efforts. Teams worked simultaneously on the insurance claim settlement, redesign and engineering, custom structural truss fabrication, geotechnical analysis and excavation and work-force scheduling. At some points there were as many as 100 people working on-site to expedite the reconstruction process. Each trade worked on an accelerated schedule and in many cases worked in concert with other trades in the same spaces simultaneously.

Bringing Valley View School's buildings up to current code meant they would no longer be using fossil fuels to heat the buildings. Instead, everything would be electric. Previously

where a single 300 AMP electrical service panel serviced the building, after the reconstruction a sophisticated 1,000 AMP service panel replaced it. New HVAC systems were installed to provide heating and cooling, controlled by a central energy management system. Additionally, all of the lighting fixtures and lamps that were installed were LEED-certified to significantly increase energy savings.

While the fire caused a tremendous amount of chaos, it was an educational lesson on resiliency for Valley View School. BELFOR Property Restoration was proud to help “restore more than property” in transforming the academic campus from charred memories into a place of learning for generations to come.

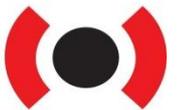


“This picture was taken after lunch today with the boys wearing the new sweatshirts provided by one of our student’s parents...they read ‘VVS Strong’. This continues to be our mantra and, I believe, will be our mantra for years.”<sup>3</sup>

#### References:

- 1: Letter to Parents from Rick Bulger, about the fire at Valley View School on Friday, October 25, 2013: <http://valleyviewschool.org/valley-view-fire/>
- 2: Who We Are: <http://valleyviewschool.org/experiential-education/>
- 3: 11/9 Update from Rick Bulger: <http://valleyviewschool.org/119-update-rick-bulger/>

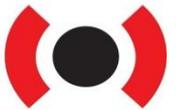
# Before and After the Fire



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