

Weather weary

PHOTOS BY LAYN MUDDER



The tears of weather weary North Dakotans flowed with this spring's flood waters as treasured belongings turned to trash and cherished livestock perished. Inside, read how area residents coped.

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Mother

by Luann Dart

SNOW. WATER. MUD. The tears of weather weary North Dakotans flowed with this spring's flood waters as treasured belongings turned to trash and cherished livestock perished.

Record-setting snowfall followed by devastating spring flooding wreaked havoc throughout KEM Electric Cooperative's service territory and beyond.

'It's mass destruction'

"We didn't have a flood, we had a tsunami," Shirly Benz said, describing the wall of water and ice that rushed through the family farm March 22. "We've never seen such devastation here. It looks like a tornado went through."

When Long Lake Creek rushed over its banks near Moffit March 22, the Dennis and Shirly Benz farm stood in its way. A railroad trestle blocking gigantic icebergs broke and ice measuring 30 feet across and five feet high crashed into the Benz farm. The family had already grabbed photo albums and guns from the basement and made a mad dash out of harm's way. Their base-



Nature's wrath

ment was completely filled with water, a tool shed was lifted off its foundation and five feet of water entered the barn.

"It's mass destruction," Shirly said, describing the scene. "My whole yard was icebergs."

Of the family's small herd of 10 cattle, only three yearlings survived.

Between March 22 and Easter, the family was able to return home for two days before a second flood struck.

Friends and neighbors descended on the home and completely cleaned the basement in four hours, Shirly said. The couple's son and daughter-in-law, Aaron and Ang, and their children also live on the farm. "If we started thanking people, we could have 10 pages," she said.

'It's been overwhelming'

Linton's boys basketball team captured its first state championship since 1985 on Saturday night, March 21. But on Sunday, they returned to a community in trouble. Linton's "Old Town" section west of Highway 83 was flooding. Saturday's cham-

pions quickly turned into heroes of another sort as they helped with sandbagging their community.

Beaver Creek swallowed 100 homes in Linton; water reached the main floor in half of them and at least 11 had structural damage, explained Shawna Paul, Emmons County emergency manager.

The creek crested at 18.83 feet, the highest level ever and more than three feet higher than the 15-foot crest of 1997. Flood stage is nine feet.

"It's been overwhelming," Paul said. "I can't even describe what it's been like. It was awful, actually. There was so much devastation and people were just so overwrought with their houses underwater and losing all their stuff. It was really hard to watch them when they'd lost so much."

Then on Easter weekend, Spring Creek reached into Old Town again, cresting at 14.5 feet.

"The community really stepped up," Paul said, using 27,000 sandbags to brace against the flood.

As the flood waters rose, three natives of Linton who serve in the 957 Engineer Company out of

Continued on following pages



One hundred homes in Linton were flooded during the March crest of Beaver Creek. Volunteers from Operation Blessing, Samaritan's Purse and Nechama spent time in the community helping to clean damaged homes.

Bismarck arrived to assist with evacuating residents, sandbagging and providing security on roads that were flooded.

"I was relieved to be able to go down there and help them," said Staff Sgt. Vanessa Imdieke, who also served in Iraq in 2003. "You're helping people that thank you every day for serving your country and it's awesome that you can help them out personally. You help them out in the big picture in the world, but when it's one-on-one, it's so much more fulfilling."

Linton natives Sgt. Andy Roehrich and Specialist Mike Heying were also in Linton while the rest of the 957 Engineer Company was dispatched to Fargo.

"A lot of people were really appreciative and I wish we could have done more," Imdieke said.

KEM Electric Cooperative employees helped the community where needed, assisting with sandbagging, serving food to volunteers and helping to clean homes, explained Member Services Representative Brian Jacob.

"Everybody comes together and helps everybody out, so the community really pulled together," he said.



KEM Electric Cooperative will continue to repair downed poles toppled by icebergs during the March flooding.



Six miles east of Linton, Jerry Kuhn's 21 cattle were surrounded by water at one point. Fences and corrals were washed away in flood waters and Kuhn sold his herd soon after the waters receded.

'In survival mode'

Rural areas were hard hit, too. "There's areas where the roads are gone, the culverts are gone, the bridges are washed out," Paul said.

Of the 1,100 miles of rural roads in Emmons County, 700 were damaged, according to Paul.

In Kidder County, emergency management coordinator Jim Albrecht estimated that every road running east and west was damaged at one point. "The township roads are in pretty bad shape," he said. Five or six homes in Tappen were also affected by flood waters. And the walls of one home in the Wishek area collapsed due to flooding.

Buried by snow, flooded by water and knee deep in mud, the state's livestock producers were battling for survival.

"Everybody's kind of in survival mode right now," explained Doug Bichler, an agent with the Emmons County Extension Service.

"This is probably one of the worst winters that we've ever had on record," he said. Stressed by winter, cows entering spring calving faced difficulties, he explained, estimating livestock losses in the thousands.

"Being a cattle producer myself, it's really hard for people to grasp what you're dealing with," he said. "Obviously we love our livestock or we wouldn't be out with them when it's 30 below or we wouldn't be



Waters reached record flood levels in Linton along Highway 83.



While flood waters reached KEM Electric Cooperative's pole yard, the poles were salvaged.



Flood waters reached halfway up the barn door at the Dennis and Shirly Benz farm near Moffit.

trudging through knee deep mud to get to our cattle. They're more than a livelihood and it's frustrating when you do everything possible for them and it's just not enough."

He's advising livestock producers to carefully document each loss so any future assistance can be accessed.

'There's a lot of work to be done'

KEM Electric Cooperative was also hit by icebergs, which toppled poles in flooded areas.

"There was so much ice out there that we couldn't get there to repair the poles," Jacob explained. "They were probably the size of two vehicles. They were massive."

For now, the cooperative strung wire further apart and was innovative in restoring wire. At one point, the line superintendent was snagging unenergized wires by casting with a fishing pole, Jacob said with a laugh.

"There's still a lot of work to be done," Jacob said of repairing the system.

"We're soaking up the sun and hoping we get as many days of warm weather as we can to start drying things out," Bichler said hopefully.

"It's been a ride," Shirly Benz said.



Anita Ibach serves refreshments to North Dakota National Guard members helping in Linton. Linton natives Staff Sgt. Vanessa Imdieke, Sgt. Andy Roehrich and Specialist Mike Heying all assisted the community.



Individuals who suffered property damage during the spring flooding should contact the Federal Emergency Management Agency at (800) 621-3362 or visit www.disasterassistance.gov by May 10.

SERVING THE COOPERATIVE

Two employees of KEM Electric Cooperative were recently recognized for their years of service to the cooperative.

Jeff Gefre, area foreman, has served for 20 years, starting with KEM Electric in 1989.

His favorite aspects of linework include “building new overhead and underground lines, being outdoors in the country on nice weather days and talking to and helping consumers,” he says.

Jeff’s wife, Sherry, of 15 years is employed at St. Anthony Church. They have three children: Brent 14, Courtney, 12, and Jared, 8.

Gary Hulm, general foreman, has been with KEM Electric for 30 years, since 1979.

“Having the opportunity to work outside during the summer and fall months,” is his favorite part of linework.

Gary’s wife, Delrae, is employed at Linton Public School as a kindergarten teacher. Their children include Annalee who is a sophomore at Boston University and Colin who is a senior at Linton Public School.



Gefre



Hulm

SUPPORTING OUR YOUTH

KEM Electric Cooperative awards scholarships

KEM Electric Cooperative strongly believes in the future of area students. To help students prepare for their future journey, KEM Electric Cooperative, along with Basin Electric Power Cooperative, has awarded two college scholarships for the 2009-2010 school year, one in the amount of \$1,000 and one for \$500, to qualifying dependents of a KEM Electric member.

Stephanie Bechtle

Winning the \$1,000 scholarship is Stephanie Bechtle, a 2008 graduate from Wishek High School, who is a freshman at Northern State University where she is majoring in biology.

At Northern State University (NSU), she is active in Science Club, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Campus Crusade for Christ. She is also employed at Wishek Drug and as a chemistry tutor for NSU.

Stephanie lives north of Wishek on the family farm with her parents, Blair and Doreen Bechtle. She has an older brother, Michael, a younger sister, Amy, and a younger brother, Aaron. In her spare time, Stephanie enjoys quilting and reading.

Ashlee Bernhardt

Ashlee Bernhardt, the daughter of Tom and Tamie Bernhardt, Linton, is the \$500 scholarship recipient.

The 18-year-old is the third of five children. Her oldest sister, Heather, lives in Atlanta, Ga., with her husband, Tim Curran. Amber lives in Fargo, where she is going to school to become a school educator. Her two younger siblings, Austin and Jenna, are in the sixth and fourth grades, respectively, at Linton Public School. They family operates a cow/calf operation and grain farm.

In school, Ashlee is active in FBLA, FCCLA, National Honor Society, drama, and basketball. She also enjoys reading, writing, and being with friends.

In the future, she plans to move to Moorhead, Minn., to pursue a degree as a registered nurse.



Bechtle



Bernhardt

BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

March 20



- Learned Wishek outpost building was moved to Linton
- Monthly financial reports were reviewed
- Assigned margins for 2008
- Heard safety report for KEM
- Reviewed Rural Utilities Service audit report
- Approved special equipment summary
- Authorized retirement of capital credit estate

Be sure to attend your annual meeting!

KEM Electric Cooperative 2009 ANNUAL MEETING

June 18 in Linton

The priority for the evening is to take care of the business of the cooperative, including the election of directors. This year, the director seats up for election are those of Adolph Feyereisen in District 1, and Carter Vander Wal in District 2.

Watch for more details in the June KEM Electric Cooperative pages in *North Dakota LIVING*, which will include the annual report.



Remember Memorial Day!

So KEM Electric Cooperative employees can celebrate the holiday with their families, our office will be closed Memorial Day, May 25.

If you experience an outage, please call the cooperative's office at (701) 254-4666 or (800) 472-2673. Your call will be routed to the proper contacts and lineworkers will be dispatched.

ALWAYS
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BEFORE YOU
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KEM ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE INC.

107 S. Broadway - Linton, N.D. 58552

DIRECTORS:

Dean Dewald, Chairman.....Steele
Milton Brandner, Vice Chairman...Zeeland
Carmen Essig, Secretary.....Lehr
Adolph Feyereisen, Director.....Braddock
William J. Piatz, Director.....Napoleon
Dean Hummel, Director.....Hague
Carter Vander Wal, Director.....Pollock
Bair, Bair and Garrity, Atty.Mandan
HDR Engineers Inc.,
Consulting Engr.....Bismarck
Ken Berreth, Gen. Mgr.Linton

Report outages to the following
toll-free number: (800) 472-2673

Hazleton, Linton and Strasburg exchanges'
phone number: (701) 254-4666

OFFICE HOURS:

Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30
p.m.

Web site: kemelectric.com

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