

April 21, 2001: Remembering the destruction

1 killed, many injured; 182 homes destroyed

Tornado devastates Hoisington

(From the Hoisington Dispatch, April 26, 2001 edition).

It gave almost no warning, but in the few minutes it took to drop from the sky and travel through Hoisington, it changed the future of the community and lives of nearly every area resident.

At around 9:15 Saturday evening, a massive tornado dropped with almost no warning near the ballfields on the west edge of Hoisington. The tornado traveled in a northeast direction, cutting a swath through town until it left town near the northeast corner.

In its wake, it left death and destruction that will take years to physically recover from.

The tornado was classified as an F-4 tornado, which is the second worst. An F-4 tornado is classified as a devastating tornado with winds from 207-260 miles per hour. It levels well-constructed houses and throws cars. The tornado was a quarter mile wide by a half mile long, according to the Adjutant General's Office.

One man was killed in the tornado. Gerald Tauscher died when a van fell on him. Four critically injured persons were transferred by Lifewatch helicopter to Wichita and some have been able to return as of Tuesday. There were 28 major injuries and many other minor injuries.

The figures of the destruction are mind-bog-

gling. According to the Adjutant General's office, 569 residences were affected by the tornado, including 559 single family homes, four multiple family homes and six mobile homes. A total of 182 homes were destroyed, 52 sustained major damage, 180 had minor damage and 155 homes had some damage.

Damage has been estimated at more than \$27 million.

About 30 percent of the community was severely damaged. Major buildings were damaged, including the high school, Clara Barton Hospital, Town & Country Supermarket in the Cardinal Plaza Shopping Center, Dairy Queen and other buildings.

Over 30 city blocks were affected, and many of those blocks will have to be completely leveled, if they weren't already by the tornado.

Those are the grim facts, and they are ugly.

After the tornado, the community quickly turned its attention to moving ahead. Sunday morning, the area was barricaded while search teams, including some dogs who had looked for victims in the Oklahoma City bombing several years ago, swept the area looking for victims. There were also concerns about gas leaks and other safety hazards.

The City Building was the command station. Seemingly within minutes of the tornado leaving, law enforcement, medical personnel and fire depart-



An American flag flies over the debris left in the wake of a tornado which struck Hoisington, Kansas. More than 400 homes were damaged or destroyed. (photo by Dave Saville/FEMA News)

ments came from all over. The Red Cross rapidly set up a station and people began to gather in the confusion.

Around noon, area residents were allowed to go back into the area to search for belongings and start the clean-up effort. The tornado made national news and volunteers streamed into Hoisington to assist with the clean-up effort. Hundreds of people have come to help. The Red Cross and the Salvation Army have stations in downtown Hoisington. They have been accepting clothing and other items, and have been besieged by donors.

The basement of the Knights of Columbus is filled to overflowing and the Salvation Army has

stored extra items in a semi-truck. They have fed hundreds of people every day, along with passing out drinks. As of Tuesday morning, the Salvation Army had served 2,144 meals.

Volunteer workers have included eight inmates and two supervisors from the Ellsworth Correctional Facility; two 10-man crews from the Larned Correctional Facility and five crews from the Norton Correctional Facility East (Stockton).

Work is being done quickly to help private individuals and public agencies. Two Public Assistance damage assessment teams are on the ground, working to estimate damage to the public infrastructure.

Tuesday morning they met with representatives of public agencies, including four townships that were also affected by the tornado and by the flooding that followed. Two other teams are compiling damage and insurance information for Individual Assistance figures.

They will make a preliminary assessment, which will be used when asking for a Presidential disaster declaration.

A telephone hotline has been established by the Salvation Army to take donations for the storm victims. The number is (620) 653-4029. A second phone line has been set up for persons wishing to volunteer to help with the recovery. That number is (620) 653-4150.

15 years ago: April 21 forever a dark memory for Hoisington residents

By MIKE COURSON

April 21, 2001 was shaping up to be just like any other day in Hoisington. Hoisington High students were getting ready for prom. Dairy Queen was preparing for its Alumni Day.

Of course, that day proved to be anything but ordinary as a large tornado ripped through the community around 9:15 that Saturday night.

Working for a small-town newspaper can be interesting. There is not always enough hard news to fill an edition. In that way, the small newspaper can be a treasure as some of the smaller community events that may have otherwise gone unnoticed end up on the front page.

Luke Brown was the editor of the Dispatch in

2001. At that time, I was a freshman in college at Fort Hays State University. I actually remember watching the radar from my dorm room that night and quipping to a friend in Manhattan to watch out for tornadoes as the entire system seemed to be going around in a circle. Later, after the tornado hit, I sped through two counties of tornado warnings to get to Hoisington but it was too messy to do much of anything.

So I never met Mr. Brown, but Lori Waters, our advertising director, and I have enjoyed poring over his coverage of the tornado. Now working for some small-town newspapers, I understand the monumental but hugely important task of tracking down informa-



This sign in front of Clayton Williamson's demolished home told of the journey ahead. (courtesy photo)

tion from so many different sources. Mr. Brown had less than a week to put out that first edition of the Dispatch following the tornado, and he did a great job of getting the essentials out in that Thursday edition.

Later, special sections

further documented the destruction and community efforts to rebuild after the tornado. Again, Mr. Brown did a great job.

Fast-forward to 2016 and technology has greatly changed. Digital photography was still

relatively new in 2001. Imagine the digital wealth of information we would have of such an event today. Fortunately, from the work of others, we were still able to find enough pieces to put this section together.

So thank you, Mr. Brown, for your work done in 2001, and thank you to everyone who shared a piece of themselves either with Mr. Brown, or with us while we prepared for this section.

April 21, 2001 will be a day never forgotten in Hoisington, nor should it be. In that night and the following weeks and days, the residents of Hoisington wrote an inspiring story. We wanted to take the opportunity to retell parts of it 15 years later.