

Carroll County tornado victims identified; Black Hawk surveys devastation

Courtesy of the Greenwood Commonwealth
By Kevin Edwards and Dan Marsh - Staff Writers

A Carroll County schoolteacher, her husband and her son were killed Friday night by a tornado-spawning storm system that tore its way through Mississippi.

Carroll County Coroner Mark Stiles identified the dead as Helen Munford, 54; her husband, Danny, 52; and her son, JaDarrion Murphy, 14. Helen Munford was a fourth and fifth grade social studies teacher at Marshall Elementary School and also drove a school bus. Her husband worked construction, and her son attended eighth grade at J.Z. George Middle School.

The three were among 25 reported dead statewide as of Saturday by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. Gov. Tate Reeves has declared a state of emergency in all of the affected counties.

The National Weather Service in Jackson has dispatched three storm survey teams to cover Winona, Tchula, Rolling Fork, Silver City and other nearby areas. A final assessment is expected to be completed and transmitted at 7 p.m. Saturday.

At least one tornado was confirmed to have struck in Humphreys and Sharkey County, devastating the towns of Rolling Fork and Silver City.

Stiles said it was also a tornado that demolished the doublewide mobile home in which the Munfords and Jadarrion were living. "It just exploded," he said of the residence located in the Summerfield community, off Mississippi 35 between Carrollton and Vaiden. "They took a direct hit."

Rescuers spent more than an hour and a half looking for the bodies, one of which was found several hundreds yards from the home site. Three other individuals living in the home "miraculously survived" with only minor injuries, Stiles said. One of the survivors was JaDarrion's twin brother, LaDarrion, a relative told The Clarion Ledger.

In addition to the Summerfield community, the town of Black Hawk was particularly hit hard.

The affected areas look "like a war zone," said Ken Strachan, Carroll County's emergency management director who is also the mayor of North Carrollton.

"Trees are just ripped. Houses are destroyed. It's just a terrible thing."

In addition to the three deaths, there were five re-

ported injuries and 14 homes with reported damage, according to Strachan. Six roads were covered with heavy storm debris, and scattered power outages were reported throughout the county, he said.

David O'Bryan, general manager of Delta Electric Power Association, said the utility was working to restore power to 2,500 customers in Carroll and Montgomery counties. He said 19 power poles were destroyed on Mississippi 407 south of Winona by the storm. The utility is hoping to have everyone's power restored by Sunday evening, he said.

SURVIVORS SURVEY DAMAGE

An eerie calm held sway over the storm-shattered community of Black Hawk Saturday morning as residents combed through the wreckage left by a suspected tornado that passed through the area Friday night.

Lines of traffic formed along the main thoroughfare at 7:30 a.m. as people emerged from their homes to drive around looking at the extensive damage across Highway 430, or Black Hawk Road. Trees twisted or snapped in half with sheet metal hanging from their limbs were visible from the highway — telltale signs of a tornado passing through.

Several homes had visible damage with some almost wiped away by the storm. Already people were out talking with insurance adjusters, trying to decide what their next move would be.

Matthew and Angel Streater were surveying the damage in the yard of their demolished home. "We've lived here since August 1999," said Angel, "and we have never had anything like this happen. Tornadoes don't hit Black Hawk."

That lack of fear led to an almost casual attitude as the storm neared Friday around 9 p.m. "I was laying on the couch," she said. "We had just been talking and laughing, and Matthew said he would go out on the front porch and watch. Everybody kept texting me, 'Angel, Angel,' and the Lord told me to go out and get my husband."

She said she might have saved his life in that moment as what they believe to have been a tornado came through. "We went down the hall with our little dog, and I asked (Matthew) where to go because I had no idea. We got into a closet between the two back bedrooms, in the center of the house. He squeezed in on top of me and was pulling the door shut when it hit. It happened that quick."

Angel said the walls of the closet "came up, and I thought, 'This is it, this is it.' But it didn't take us."

Neither she nor Matthew suffered injuries, though one of their dogs, Mia, was injured. Mia was seen in the yard with what appeared to be a bloody wound to her neck.

"Everybody is good," Angel said. "We're here, we're here."

Matthew said he would try to salvage whatever he could. Their home, shops containing farm equipment, and a small "deer shack" were totally destroyed. A circular dining table sat in the driveway as if it had been carefully placed there. Visible inside the remains of the home were two recliners and a Browning gun vault.

"The safe is still there with the guns," Angel said. "But my jewelry ...," her voice trailed off, indicating it had been swept away by the ferocious winds.

Angel said her husband made her stay in the closet for a while after the storm hit, which took either a couple of seconds or a couple of minutes, they estimated. "He had to go find my shoes," she said. "I wasn't wearing any, and I was sitting in water."

They said they did not know of any injuries. A nearby friend's home also sustained heavy damage. "They were remodeling it," said Matthew. "Had the Sheet-rock up."

A destroyed home with sheet metal tied up in the trees sat across the highway from the Streater residence, and a pickup appeared to have tumbled into a ditch. Broken limbs and downed power lines were abundant, though chainsaws had been used to cut the debris and clear it from the roadway. John Shute, 75, drove slowly along looking at the damage.

"I was born in the middle of downtown Black Hawk," Shute said. "I've never seen anything like this."

He said he lives in a mobile home near Mt. Olive Baptist Church. "I heard a lot of wind, a whole lot of wind and noise," he said. "A neighbor called me and said to come to his house. I went over there, and we watched the weather on our phones. I didn't hear the tornado. Someone called on the phone and said it had blown away a house."

He said he and his father, who died in 1985, built the parsonage for the local United Methodist Church in 1977. "They're both demolished," he said. "So is the old Black Hawk Schoolhouse. My daddy donated a lot of

BLS: Mississippi unemployment rate falls to 3.7%

By PRESS RELEASE - US BLS

Below is a press release from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics:

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics recently released their State Employment and Unemployment Summary

money to that parsonage."

Pickups lined the road leading to the sites of the former Methodist Church and the schoolhouse, both of which lay in rubble. Snapped trees, twisted metal, downed lines, and other wreckage continued in what appeared to be a path across the rural county road. The church, the parsonage and the old school looked to have been stamped flat.

Gary Phillips said he and his wife, Michelle, along with their son were sitting inside a pickup underneath a carport roof at the parsonage when the storm came through. "We were sitting there, watching the weather on our phones. All of a sudden, it started hailing real bad, and the windows imploded. I guess the vortex came over us, you can tell by your ears."

He pointed to the demolished parsonage. "That's what's left," he said. "All I can say is, we had a guardian angel, without a doubt."

Phillips, 71, said he was born and raised in the Black Hawk Methodist Church, which recently became independent. "I've lived here all my life," he said. "The closest to this came when I was 11 or 12, on Mt. Olive Road. But we never had anything

(Continued on page 6.)

for February of 2023.

In February, unemployment rates were lower in February in 9 states, higher in 3 states and the District of Columbia, and stable in 38 states. Nonfarm payroll employment increased in 6 states and was essentially unchanged in 44 states and the District of Columbia.

The current unemployment

rate for Mississippi (as of February 2023) stands at 3.7 percent.

For comparison, the unemployment rate for the previous reported month (January 2023) was reported as 3.9 percent.

Mississippi stands at a 0.3 percent decrease from the same point the previous year (February, 2022).

Mississippi's unemployment rate at the beginning of the previous year was 4.1 percent (in January, 2022).

The national unemployment rate currently stands at 3.6 percent, which has risen 0.2 percent from January 2023 (last month's report).

City of Tchula Board Meeting Change Notice
The monthly Mayor & Board of Alderman meeting for the month of April will be changed to Wednesday, April 5th, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.

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HOLMES COUNTY COMMUNITY HEALTH FAIR

Tuesday, April 4, 2023
1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Arts Council Building
Lexington

For additional information contact:
mobilehealth@msphi.org or
601-398-4406