

Lanier County News

Covering Lanier & Northern Lowndes Counties

Volume 104 Number 6 — 1 Section 10 Pages

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Thursday, February 8, 2024 Lakeland, GA

Lowndes County Experienced 120 MPH Winds during Storm: EF-2 Tornado Damage



By Carol A. Gasser Moore

LOWNDES COUNTY, Georgia – Sunday's round of severe storms also brought tornado warnings. While Lanier, Berrien, north Lowndes, and Cook Counties experienced wind gusts. Tornado warning sirens were not engaged locally. However, the same storms brought 120 MPH winds into south Lowndes County which were officially labeled an EF-2 Tornado.

According to national tornado statistics, there are 6 days in Georgia on average in which tornadoes occur. The most likely time of year for Georgia tornadoes ranges from March to May. With that said, A February tornado is a uncommon occurrence, but one of those unusual occurrences did arise in Lowndes County over the weekend. Sunday's storm prompted weather watchers to spot tornadoes in the sky. Many stay up in the sky, but one actually came down to the ground in south Lowndes County on Sunday.

This former Oklahoman, who lived in Tornado Alley for decades, learned that mid-to-late afternoon is usually the time frame in which any tornado prone area is likely to experience a tornado. Experience also indicates that tornadoes tend to start in the southwest area and move

in a northeastern direction. Both facts proved true in Sunday's Lowndes County tornado.

According to websites providing storm preparedness, the entire state of Georgia experience tornadoes. The most common area of Georgia in which most Georgia tornadoes occur is in the northern Atlanta area. Tornadoes develop from powerful thunderstorms which are a collision of both cold and warm air masses. Often, there is little prior warning when a tornado develops as they tend to develop quite suddenly.

In Sunday's tornado in Lowndes County, the tornado touched down east of Inner Perimeter Road. Two people were inside a mobile home in that area, which was completely destroyed by the 120 MPH winds. One of those residents suffered a broken shoulder blade and the other a broken leg.

This regional area experience rounds of rain and severe storms Sunday afternoon. The first tornado spotted by this writer was from Moody Air Force Base. The storms began a series of tornado warnings to be distributed.

In this immediate area, Lowndes County was the area which took the worst hit. The EF-2 Tornado touched

down in north Florida, the Valdosta area and the Clinch County areas. The National Weather Service (NWS) confirmed the EF-2 tornado.

According to the NWS Tallahassee, Sunday's tornado was on the ground for at least six (6) miles. Anyone in the area after the storm passed was confronted with large piles of debris in the area.

In addition to the mobile home in which there were two injuries, another unoccupied mobile home was lifted off of its base and flattened. Power poles were reported broken on Ezelle Road. Ezelle Road is about six miles east of Valdosta Regional Airport. Since the initial report, the Lanier County News has learned that other structures were damaged on the northeast side of Valdosta, along U.S. Highway 84 as the storm passed through the area. Another large area of damage was reported along Sipper Bridge Road.

Weather forecasters indicate that Sunday's storm was fueled by a low-pressure system which blew in from the Gulf Coast.

Coffee County Man Arrested for the Sexual Exploitation of Children

By Carol A. Gasser Moore

COFFEE COUNTY, Georgia - Lonnie Smith (32) of Coffee County has been charged with one count of Sexual Exploitation of Children by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI). Smith was charged on Monday, February 5 by the GBI's Child Exploitation and Computer Crimes (CEACC) Unit.

Smith's arrest by the GBI CEACC Unit signals the fact that the Unit began an investigation into Smith's online activity. The CEACC Unit received a Cyber Tipline Report from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) regarding the possible online possession and distribution of child sexual abuse material. The CEACC's investigation led to a search warrant at Smith's home and his subsequent arrest.

The GBI CEACC unit was aided in the execution of this search warrant by the Coffee County Sheriff's Office (CCSO).

Smith was taken to the Coffee County Jail.

This investigation is part of the ongoing effort by the Georgia Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force, housed within the GBI's Child Exploitation and Computer Crimes Unit, to identify those involved in the trade of child sexual abuse material. The ICAC Program, created by the U. S. Department of Justice, was developed in response to the increasing number of children and teenagers using the Internet, the proliferation of child sexual abuse material, and the heightened online activity by predators searching for unsupervised contact with underage victims.

Anyone with information about other cases of child exploitation is asked to contact the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Child Exploitation Unit at 404-270-8870 or report via the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children Cyber Tipline at [CyberTipline.org/](https://www.cybertipline.org/).

Anonymous tips can also be submitted by calling 1-800-597-TIPS (8477), online at <https://gbi.georgia.gov/submit-tips-online/>, or by downloading the See Something, Send Something mobile app.

Grass Fire Destroys Oak Ridge Subdivision Mobile Home and brings 2 more Calls



By Carol A. Gasser Moore

LANIER COUNTY, Georgia – Lakeland-Lanier County Fire Department has reported that on Saturday, February 3, the LLCFD was called to a grass fire in Oak Ridge Subdivision. When emergency personnel responded to the E911 call, they arrived to find that three (3) properties had grass on fire as well as one mobile home, which had started to burn.

LLCFD firemen as well as the subdivision's neighbors with hoses worked to stop the fire's spread before more houses were damaged.

Luckily, the mobile home was vacant. Regardless, the owner experienced the complete devastation of the mobile home. According to LLCFD, several feet of a wooden privacy fence were also completely destroyed before the fire could be contained and put out completely.

Two other grass fire calls were made to Tri-County E911 before the February 3 day was complete.

The LLCFD responded to a grass fire near a trailer on Thigpen Circle. A third call came which identified a grass fire on Good Home Road.

The Thigpen Circle fire was found spreading in a yard when the LLCFD volunteer firefighters arrived. They contained that fire in a short timeframe. No damage to the home was reported.

When LLCFD firefighters arrived at the Good Home Road grass fire, they found that the grass fire had spread to a wooded area behind the home located on the property. Firefighters reported that the owners were containing the grass fire with shovels. As they did, the firemen attacked the fire in the woods before it became a bigger problem. LLCFD indicates that all of the flames were extinguished in a short time.

In all three calls, firefighters indicate that the fires had stemmed from debris pile that were being burned on a windy day. Fire Chief Gary Yeomans revealed in a conversation that February has always been the most active month for fires in Lanier County each year because of the burning of yard debris. According to Yeomans, one year our Lanier County firefighters responded to over 50 grass fires which still is the record for fires in Lanier County.

According to state law, property owners are allowed to burn small amounts of yard debris annually, from October 1 to April 30. Only in the Atlanta area is outdoor burning prohibited annually from the beginning of May to the end of September. With that said, the public is advised to take extra precautions when it's a windy day.

This writer watched a neighbor trying to contain a debris fire one Spring day with his two children and gunny sacks. The LLCFD wound up being called two more times because each time the fire was lit, it spread faster than the home owner could contain or put out. Another neighbor thinking that his yard fence would be a wind break, wound up being called twice to his residence. At the end of the day, he had his yard debris more or less gone ... along with several yards of his wooden fence!



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