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## Blade Area

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Article published June 06, 2010

### Devastated residents work to aid neighbors Strickland: Damage 'almost unbelievable'

By TOM TROY

BLADE STAFF WRITER

MILLBURY, Ohio — Residents Sunday began recovering from the "almost unbelievable" damage caused by a tornado that blasted through northern Wood County late Saturday, taking seven lives and wrecking more than 100 buildings.



The Millbury area, between Northwood and Genoa near the Wood-Ottawa county line, is an epicenter in the storm's deadly path of destruction through the region. (THE BLADE/DAVE ZAPOTOSKY)

The dead included a 4-year-old boy and his mother, and the father of the Lake High School valedictorian, who was to speak at a graduation set for yesterday afternoon that was postponed because the school was destroyed hours earlier.

The seven confirmed deaths resulted from an 8-mile path of destruction in Wood County and neighboring Ottawa County. At least 30 others were injured.

The National Weather Service office in Cleveland yesterday afternoon confirmed a tornado with winds estimated between 136 and 165 mph had struck the area. "It's at least an EF-3, moderate-to-major tornado," Meteorologist Frank Kielyka said.

The twister that ravaged northern Wood County was the strongest of five that the National Weather Service said hit the Toledo area late Saturday and early yesterday. EF-2 rated storms hit eastern Fulton County and western Monroe County near Dundee while weaker EF-1 twisters touched down in northwest Lenawee County and northeast of Monroe — the latter causing minor damage at the Fermi 2 Nuclear Power Station.

Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland toured the scenes of devastation in Lake Township and Millbury after declaring a state of emergency at 8:10 a.m. and promised the help of state and federal authorities.

"It's a tragedy, obviously. The loss of life is the most important because everything else can be replaced," Mr. Strickland said.

#### DAMAGE IN LAKE TOWNSHIP

According to the National Weather Service, the twister touched down near Oregon Road and the Ohio Turnpike at about 11:15 p.m., and was on the ground almost continuously for 8-10 miles before striking just west of City Center in Ottawa County at about 11:30 p.m.



1. Friendly Village Mobile Home Park: trailers destroyed from foundations.  
2. Millery: buildings damaged/destroyed.  
3. Lake Twp. Admin. Building: Police Department: Heavy damage with 1 death.  
4. Lake High School: destroyed and 1 student died, nearby on State Rd. 709.  
5. Ayers Rd./Main St.: Military systems heavy damage, 5 deaths in homes.  
6. Trowbridge Rd.: houses demolished along road.

"It seems almost unbelievable that a force of nature in a matter of a few seconds could do the damage that was done," Mr. Strickland said.

He said 50 homes were destroyed in the four-county area and at least 50 were severely damaged. The governor added that the worst damage was in Wood County.

The Lake Township Police and Fire Departments used the Nagle Cos. trucking business across Moline-Martin Road as their command center after the twister destroyed the township administrative building.

At least three deaths occurred in Millbury, a village of some 1,200 about 10 miles southeast of Toledo. They were:

w Ted Kranz, 46, of Case Road, the father of Katie Kranz, the Lake High School valedictorian.

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w Hayden Walters, 4, and his mother, Mary Walters of Main Street. The boy was killed during the tornado and Mrs. Walters died later at a Toledo hospital.

Mrs. Walters' husband, Ryan, and their daughter, Maddison, were critically injured and taken to Mercy St. Vincent Medical Center, according to friends of the Walters family.

Two deaths occurred near the destruction of the Lake Township building and Lake High School. They were:

w Bailey Bowman, 21, of Walbridge, who was picked up and tossed by the tornado as she, a male companion, and her small child were trying to take refuge at the Lake Township police station.

w Kathleen Hammitt, a Wauseon woman in her 50s, who was struck by airborne debris while driving on State Rt. 795.

Two others were confirmed dead last night but their names were not immediately available.

#### Homes off foundations

In Millbury, a small town dotted with churches and surrounded by farm fields, several homes on Main Street south of Ayers Road were wiped off their foundations, including that of the Walters family.

Pieces of appliances, toys, clothes, glass, and concrete, as well as overhead utility lines, covered the Walters' yard, along with seven demolished cars.

Also destroyed was the house across Main from the Walters' home. Governor Strickland peered into the debris-filled open basement, but no one knew for sure whether anybody had been inside when the storm came through.

Mr. Strickland shook the hand of Kristi Bock, 27, for helping tend to the injured.

"Thank you for your concern for other people. You're a hero," he told her.

Ms. Bock said she and her father and his softball team had been having a party when the storm blew through. Afterward, they went up the street and rescued injured people and took the ones who could be moved to the home of her parents, Russell and Tammy Beach. "It wasn't just me, that's for sure. It was a lot of people. The whole community came together," Ms. Bock said.

"We pulled a lot of people from their houses. We started with kids that we could get out first and we took them to my parents' house," Ms. Bock said. "We found a whole bunch of people injured, that were helpless, they couldn't move."

She said she found an 8-year-old girl whom she knew only as Emily lying in a driveway and covered with blood and sat with and comforted her until emergency workers took her away in an ambulance.

Dave Jacobs, a truck driver, was out of town and returning to Millbury when his terrified wife, Teresa, called him to say she was hunkered down in her house, which was only a few houses away from the tornado's path.

"When I got here, it was just chaos," Mr. Jacobs said. He said neighbors grabbed flashlights and combed through the field behind the homes for injured people.

Donna Baker of Northwood was in Millbury visiting her mother, Edith Smith, on Cherry Street when the tornado sirens sounded. Because the house has no basement, they fled to a neighbor's across the street.

"We heard a freight train coming, and we knew it was a tornado," she said. "It skipped over our four houses. We were in the living room. We didn't have a chance to get down in the basement."

Kathryn Helleman, pastor of St. Peter's United Church of Christ on Main Street, a block from where the Walters' home was destroyed, provided a resting place, restrooms, and refreshments the day after the storm.

The Red Cross was to be at the church Monday morning, 9 a.m. to noon, to assess losses.

"Folks are pulling together. Lots of people are asking what they can do. Lots of people are donating resources," Ms. Helleman said.

#### 'There was no upstairs'

Less than a mile away and across a field from Millbury's Main Street is Case Road where the Kranz family home was destroyed.

Authorities said Mr. Kranz stepped outside of his home during the storm and was struck when part of the house fell on him.

Deb Wintersmith, a friend of his widow, said the Kranz family was in the basement when it is believed Mr. Kranz went up to check on a generator that was keeping sump pumps operating.

A neighbor of the Kranzes, Steve Conley of 1765 Marilyn Ave., said he and his son, Scott, helped pull the family out of the basement and heard a plea from Mrs. Kranz.

"She said her husband was upstairs, but you know there was no upstairs to go to," Mr. Conley said.

Mr. Kranz's brother, Tim Kranz, said Ted Kranz was a driven small business owner. He left his previous job as a computer programmer designing software for the medical insurance industry about five years ago to launch his company, Digi-Tise.

The Millbury-based firm distributes plasma screens to area businesses to market their own wares or to sell advertisements for other companies. He'd sold the screens to area restaurants and gas stations and recently contracted with The Blade to market larger billboard screens, Tim Kranz said.

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"Even with the tough economy, he was just turning the corner and things were just starting to take off," his brother said.

Mr. Kranz was a graduate of St. John's Jesuit High School and completed an associate degree in data processing technology from the University of Toledo in 1985. He has seven siblings.

He was athletic, his brother said, and played tennis and basketball as a youngster until college, when his diabetes worsened. He was proud of his own three children's athletics, and never missed their sporting events, his brother said.

Mr. Kranz's widow and their children will be staying with his sister in the area, his brother said.

"They don't make families any better than the Kranzes. The parents are terrific, the kids are terrific, it's a loss to our school family and to our community because Ted was an absolutely outstanding man who was devoted to his family, supported our community, supported our schools," said Jim Witt, Lake superintendent. "He'll be missed."

#### **Looting reported**

Dozens of homes were damaged in Moline's Indian Creek subdivision off East Broadway. Entry into the subdivision and several other affected streets was blocked from the public by law enforcement.

Tony Smith, 28, surveyed a gaping hole in the roof of his Shawnee Avenue home and recalled feeling the house shake about 11:20 p.m. Saturday as the storm smashed into his home and tore through the neighborhood.

"We got extremely lucky," Mr. Smith said.

Farther down his street, the damage was worse. The storm had torn through the corner of one tidy, yellow home, exposing a cross section of an upstairs office and bedroom as if it were a child's dollhouse.

Volunteers from Pilgrim Church in West Toledo were set up, distributing snacks, toiletries and donated clothing to storm victims.

A groggy Sue Bradfield, 47, eagerly accepted a new toothbrush and toothpaste. Her home near the subdivision on Neill Avenue was leveled by the storm. She, her husband, and their 4-year-old son were in the basement when they heard the "deafening, ear-piercing sound" of the storm that took the home.

"I thought we were going to die," she said. "I thought we weren't going to come out of this alive."

She was afraid to leave what was left of her home, because she spent most of Sunday chasing away looters. Her young son hasn't slept and "keeps asking his daddy to fix his house," Mrs. Bradfield said.

Authorities confirmed Sunday there were reports of looters at houses that had been destroyed, including one where the owner had been killed.

#### **High school destroyed**

Touring the destruction at Lake High School, Governor Strickland said the only positive was the fact that no one was killed when the roof collapsed.

"Most people had a chance to have warning, thankfully, and that's why even with all this destruction the loss of lives was held to a minimum," the governor said.

Tim Krugh, president of the Lake Local Schools Board of Education, declared the high school destroyed, while the adjoining middle and elementary schools sustained damage from airborne debris.

The roof over the field house where the afternoon's graduation festivities were planned had caved in. Bleachers were seen in the open air, as were the books on shelves in a second-story library.

District administrators expect to pick a location early this week to reschedule the ceremony for 115 to 120 graduates.

"It's very important for our kids to graduate with the proper kind of commencement," Mr. Witt said. "I want them to walk up and receive their diplomas. I want the kids who are giving speeches to give their speeches. I want it to be as normal as possible."

Mr. Krugh said replacing the 1953 school building could take two to three years. Employees of Rudolph-Libbe, a major building contractor based in the township, surveyed the damage.

He told The Blade the destruction is hard to comprehend.

"It looks like a bomb landed right in the middle of our high school ... It looks like a war zone," the Lake board president said. "What we're going to do in the fall, how we're going to handle this, we don't know yet."

#### **35 train cars derail**

A township fire command vehicle upended by the twister came to rest at the entrance to the high school.

The fire vehicle reportedly was driven by a fire department volunteer who helped people who had come to the school from mobile homes seeking emergency shelter into a safe corridor in the building moments before the tornado hit. Up to 20 people who had sought shelter near the boiler room in the high school were uninjured.

A farm house and barns on Martin-Moline Road between the Lake Township administrative building and the high school were destroyed.

At the CSX Transportation Corp. Walbridge Yard just west of the township offices, 35 automobile-carrier cars either derailed or were blown over, said Robert Sullivan, a railroad spokesman.

Two were loaded with vehicles, while the rest were empty, Mr. Sullivan said. No hazardous materials were involved and nobody was hurt, he said.

State crews shut down State Rt. 795, between Oregon Road and the Wood/Ottawa county line.

Staff writers David Patch, Bridget Tharp, and Ignazio Messina contributed to this report.

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