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Local News



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Village seeks state, federal aid after storm

By **MARK RANZENBERGER**
Sun Staff Writer

Nathan and Melissa Smith brought their new baby home from the hospital to the house they had just rented in Lake Isabella and discovered the three-bedroom dwelling was buried under three fallen trees.

That house was among 90 homes in the village damaged by Wednesday's intense windstorm that devastated parts of the western Isabella County village.

"Those 90 houses are about one out of 10 in the entire village," Village Manager Tim Wolff said. Isabella County emergency management personnel estimated that about 30 homes were completely uninhabitable.

That included Wayne Bauer's riverfront home on Carmen Drive. He had lived there since 1974, but a huge oak tree toppled over and ripped through the roof like it was paper.

"Look," he said, as he, his daughter and his insurance agent surveyed the damage. "It didn't touch my flowers."



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Wolff said Isabella County has asked Gov. Jennifer Granholm to declare a local state of emergency, the first step toward a formal disaster declaration. That could bring some state and federal aid.

The storm hit late Thursday afternoon, and witnesses described it as brief but incredibly intense.

Rain and hail driven by 70-plus mph winds tore down hundreds of trees, particularly in and near Lake Isabella. Roofs were lifted off homes and a barn, and at least one vehicle was blown off the road.

After the storm, about 2,000 Homeworks Tri-County Electric Cooperative customers were without power, according to Homeworks spokeswoman Jayne Graham.

"The wind broke an 85-foot transmission pole, knocking two substations out of service," Graham said, "including the Weidman substation serving Lake Isabella."

The power outage also resulted in reduced water pressure for the small number of Lake Isabella residents who are part of a county-run municipal water system on the west side of the lake. Winn Telecom's wireless high-speed Internet service that serves the village also went down.

Nottawa Sherman Townships firefighters, Isabella County sheriff's deputies, the Sherman Township Marshall's office and Isabella County emergency management personnel responded quickly to the devastated village.

The National Weather Service sent in a storm damage assessment team Thursday. The team has yet to file its report, but team members said all the evidence points to a meteorological phenomenon called a microburst.

That's defined as a powerful downdraft from a thunderstorm that hits the ground and spreads at ground level. This kind of wind can do as much damage as a tornado, but with straight-line winds.

Those winds blew in the north side of the new strip mall now under construction on Coldwater Road in the village. Owner Scott Slasor said two workmen were in the storefront being built, and could only take shelter by lying on the floor until the storm passed.

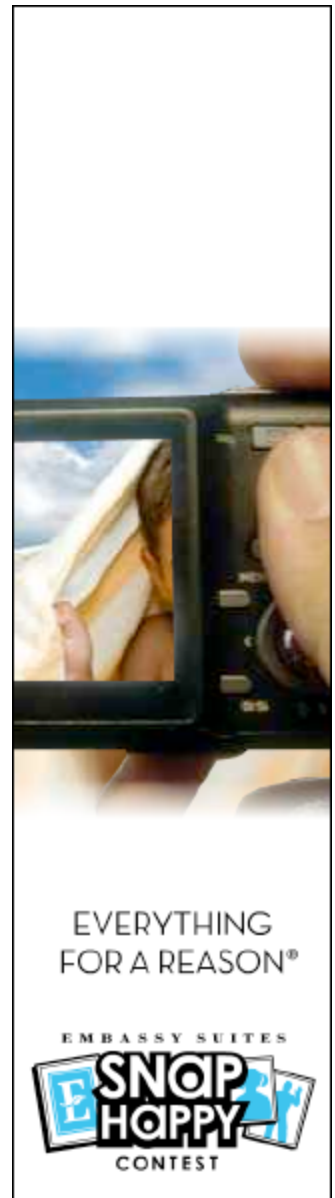
On Thursday, crews from the village and a variety of private tree-trimming companies worked to remove fallen trees from village streets, houses and yards. The sounds of chain saws and chippers echoed across the village, and a parade of dump trucks, stake trucks and vehicles hauling utility trailers hauled waste wood to village property at the corner of Baseline and School roads, where a dump site was set up.

Wolff cautioned homeowners against unscrupulous operators.

"Hire someone you know. Go with a reputable company," he said. "If someone just pulls into your driveway and says they'll do the job for a couple of hundred bucks, they could take just the wood they want and disappear."

No dollar damage estimate is yet available, and Wolff said it might be some time before all the damage comes to light.

"Damage estimating is probably the hardest thing to do after a disaster," he said.



The storm moved across Isabella and Gratiot counties, producing other reports of hail, high winds that downed some trees and intense rain, but the bulk of the damage was reported in and around Lake Isabella.

A second intense thunderstorm cell related to the same front as the Lake Isabella storm Wednesday afternoon produced a funnel cloud near Sanford, and downed trees and power lines were reported in the area between Sanford and Midland.

No one was reported injured in either storm.

See more storm damage photos at the Sun Insider blog, www.the-morning-sun.blogspot.com.

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