

# Twister destroys rural Cheyenne County homes

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scale uses 28 factors rather than the two used in the old scale. It measures the storm's effect on everything, she said, including telephone poles and high wires.

The National Weather Service web site listed 20 tornadoes in northwest Kansas and southwest Nebraska, including another EF1 which started in Greeley County and went into southern Wallace County, damaging three vacant mobile homes. Seven other tornadoes were rated EF0, producing little or no damage. The weather service received over 30 reports of large hail, the largest being softball size in Benkelman, Neb.

Tornadoes that hit Bird City, and Benkelman, Neb., were rated high EF2 or low EF3. The Grant, Neb., tornado was rated EF2 and a tornado that hit Ogallala, Neb., was rated EF1. Tornadoes that hit rural areas of west-central Kansas were rated EF1-EF2. The tornado that tore through Hodgeman and Ness counties in Kansas was rated EF3.

A National Weather Service assessment team out of Pueblo said a twister north of Holly, Colo., had grown to possibly greater than an EF3, with winds over 135 mph as it moved to the north.

The Ketzner family made it to their storm shelter, said Casey McCormick, advertising manager at *The St. Francis Herald*, but had an experience straight out of the movie "Twister."

Almost immediately after they went to the shelter, he said, the tor-



Lambs wandered about the rubble at the Nick Ketzner farm northeast of Bird City. The Ketzner home was destroyed and several of

their sheep were killed in the tornado.

Photo by Casey McCormick/The Bird City Times

nado tore off the door and blew an antique wagon wheel into the shelter. It missed Nick, his wife and two sons.

A mattress from the Ketzner home landed in a tree, and several of their sheep were killed.

The Glascos made it to a basement or shelter, McCormick said, emerging to find their home with

only one wall standing. They won the conservation district's wind-break award a couple of years ago and lost many of the trees in the storm as well. The Kamlas also made it to the basement. No one was hurt.

"Everyone's so grateful," McCormick said. "It could have been so much worse — everyone feels

we dodged a bullet. Homes and things can be replaced."

McCormick and his wife and kids went to the basement of their home in St. Francis when she noticed an unusual calm and higher humidity. They lighted candles, since the power went out. After the storm, he went to the news office along with his wife, Lezlie. They learned Bird

City had been hit and went over to see what was going on.

A lot of people have been helping to clean things up, McCormick said. It's nice to see the community pitching in, he said; people are not waiting for state or federal help. People have been bringing in boxes, he said, and a lot of people, including a group of Mennonites, have helped

with cleaning up the debris and seeing what they can salvage of people's belongings. The Sherman County sheriff came to check things out, McCormick said.

Besides the tornado, he said, there was flooding. Fields are so saturated, he said, that if the area gets more storms, it will take a long time to dry. The thresher show grounds east of Bird City are soaked, he said, and there's a joke about the "Bird City Lake," a playa along the highway that has been dry since the 1990s. It's so wet they even have frogs out there, he said.

Besides the influx of people to help, he said, there have been many who wanted to know what was going on. Big Ed's normally has about 30 people on a weeknight, he said, but Thursday night over 70 came to eat and watch the news.

McCormick said one of his pictures was shown on CNN, and some were shown on KSN-TV out of Wichita. People have been calling asking for pictures, he said.

If the tornado had moved just a little farther west, McCormick said, it would have gone straight through Bird City. It's a good thing it didn't, he said, since the sirens didn't go off. It wouldn't have mattered for the people who did get hit, he said, since they wouldn't have heard the warnings anyway, but the problem will need to be fixed before another storm hits.

Sixty-two tornadoes came out of that storm, McCormick noted.

"You hate to see the season start that way," he said.

# Holly citizens band together to clean up after tornado hits town

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hamburger arrived from Safeway's distribution center in Denver.

Walking west, we could see the bus barn collapsed on the back side of the elementary school. There may be more damage to the school than it appears, and the building will remain closed for a while.

A block west, we talked to Rosie Vana, who used to own a drug store downtown. She said her house only had minor damage, but she had lost a tree or two and her fences were gone. Her son and daughter-in-law had come down to help her and her daughter who lives across the alley.

Neighbors to the north, Lonnie and Diane Beaver, were standing in front of their home with a huge blue tarp covering the hole where the roof used to be.

Lonnie Beaver said he and his wife had gone to dinner at Shorty's Café in nearby Granada on Wednesday, then come home. They were in the living room watching television when they heard the tornado roar in.

"A huge 50-inch diameter tree in the front lawn fell and hit the house," he said. "If it had been five feet farther north it would have taken both of us."

"The next morning when I could see, I was surprised to see there was no roof left."

Beaver said the original house had a high ceiling, over nine feet, and someone had lowered the inside ceiling to eight feet.

"The tornado took off the old roof and left the newer one intact," he said. "There is not even a crack in the ceiling of the main room or the bedrooms. I have a hole in the bathroom, but that is because Rosie's evergreen hit the old cast-iron vent pipe."

Beaver said a man showed up Friday morning with a huge chain saw, chopped up the tree and hauled it away. He said he estimated the diameter at 50 inches because the man said that was the size of his chain saw and it barely reached through the trunk.

"Somebody was looking out for us," Beaver said. "We are going to have to move out for a time, but at least I get to choose what I take and what I throw away. My neighbors to the north and west were not as lucky."

Once the big tree was gone, Beaver said, a crew of volunteers came and got the small debris and there was another who raked up the lawn.

"It is really cleaned up today," he said. "People have been super. There are police and state patrol who are patrolling the damaged areas at night."

He has seen crews from Lamar, LaJunta, Limon and Lakin, Kan., helping with the cleanup and rebuilding the power lines. He said he thought one of the crews helping with cutting up the trees was from the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service office out of Springfield, Colo., about 50 miles south.

Beaver said he called his insurance agent about 10 p.m. Wednesday night and she answered the phone. He said an adjuster was down on Friday and a contractor had been called. He was hoping to have both the insurance man and the contractor together Saturday morning to assess the damage.

"I am lucky," he said; "all I need is a set of rafters and a new roof."

Across the street to the north, Clayton Sitts and his brother Kendall were hollering back and forth with his mom and dad, Larry and Kelly Sitts, as they tried to reposition a satellite dish to get the television working.

Kendall said he and his brother had come from Cortez, in far southwest Colorado, to help their parents.

Larry Sitts said he felt lucky that his house did not have that much damage. He said he lost a few shingles and had a few windows broken out. He said he thought his house was one of the oldest in town, with a construction date around 1903, and that it seemed the older

houses fared better than some of the newer ones.

Sitts said he and his sons were working on the television because it was something they could do and it took their mind off the other things they could not solve.

"You can only do this for a time and need to find a way to relax," he said.

Sitts works part time for the Buffalo Canal and the Frontier Ditch. He is the one who knows how to run the city generators, and he said he had not gotten much rest lately because of the winter blizzards. He was proud of the fact the generators can handle the whole town and were not damaged in the tornado.

Walking west, we came to the park, which runs through the middle of town. Trees were stripped, but the branches had already been hauled out, leaving a scene that could have come from a battlefield from Europe in the great wars.

The National Weather Service office in Pueblo sent an assessment

team out on Thursday, and by Saturday the team members were reporting the tornado was a high EF2 on the Enhanced Fujita intensity scale with winds of 130-135 mph, not huge on the 1-5 scale, but big enough to rip a wide path through Holly. The tornado started about nine miles south of the town, and was moving north at 50 mph, which did not give much time for warning.

Across from the park was the roofless house of Butch McCracken, which had not fared as well. One of his granddaughters was carrying shovelfulls of debris out of the house and filling a wheelbarrow out front.

McCracken said he was in his home office in the house, a modular home with a brick exterior, when he heard a sound like a freight train.

"I knew something was up," he said. "I headed out of the office and got down on the floor of a small hallway when I heard the tornado hit."

"It was very scary, and suddenly I could see black sky where the entire roof had been ripped off."

McCracken said he was pleased with the way people were coming to help with the cleanup. He was not sure the house could be saved, but was cleaning up the demolished inside with the help of his family and grandchildren.

Up the street about two blocks north of McCracken's on the west side of the park we talked to David Trusty, who was trying to figure out which of his damaged vehicles he should try to get fixed first.

He said the tornado did not do much damage to the house he is renting, but blew out windows, ripped out a cherry tree and dropped an old television tower on his vehicles.

"I knew something bad was going to happen," Trusty said. "I could see the black clouds south of town. I tried to find out about the weather."

He said he tried several different ways to get updates on the weather. He said the weather service had canceled a thunderstorm warning about 10 minutes before the tornado hit.

"I knew something we wrong," he said. "The dogs were acting

strange and wanted to be in your lap. Then I heard the wind begin to howl and felt pressure in my ears. I hollered for my family to go to the basement. We just got to the door when it hit. And moments later it was gone."

He said his two black labs were sitting on the back steps when they went out to check on things after the tornado passed, and all their fences were gone. He said his other dog was not around, and they called for him but he didn't come. He said the next day his wife heard a dog barking at the back door and when she opened, it there was the other dog.

"People are always saying it sounds like a freight train," he said, "but I have heard freight trains. I worked on a flight line, and to me, it sounded like a Boeing 747 trying to take off in the park."

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## School calendar for April 4 to April 10

**Wednesday:** Black Day; Elementary Bank Day; PDC Meeting at 3:45, NWKL Meeting at Atwood at 8:30 a.m., Kansas Honors Program at Oberlin at 5:30. Junior High Reading State Assessment Tests

**Thursday:** Gold Day; Boys Varsity Golf at Norton at 8 a.m., Track at Norton Invitational at 2 p.m., Varsity Baseball at Colby at 3 p.m., Varsity and Junior Varsity Softball at Home against Scott City at 3 and 5 p.m., Junior High Reading State Assessment Tests

**Friday:** NO SCHOOL – Good Friday

**Saturday:** State Science Olympiad at Wichita at 8 a.m.

**Monday:** Junior High Reading State Assessment Tests, 6th Grade Music Practice in High School Auditorium, Boys Varsity Tennis at Hays at 2 p.m., 9th and 10th Grade Track at Norton 2 p.m., 5 p.m. GAC Youth Soccer at North, Board of Education Meeting.

**Tuesday:** Black Day, 7 a.m. High School enrollment, 9:30 a.m. 6th Grade Music practice in High School Auditorium, Boys Varsity Golf – Goodland Invitational – at 1 p.m., Boys Varsity Tennis at Larned at 3 p.m., Boys Varsity Baseball at Ulysses at 5:30 p.m., 5 p.m. GAC Youth Soccer at North., 7 p.m. 6th Grade Music Practice.

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