

Mother and 2 children die in Flora fire

Lightning suspected cause

Susan Scholl
Editor

Services were held Tuesday for a Flora mother and her two young children who perished in a fire at their home north of Flora Friday night.

The fire claimed the lives of Dr. Brian Wagoner's wife, Leah, 40, and their two children, Harrison, 8, and Sophia, 4. Their lives were celebrated at a service at their church, Faith Baptist, in Lafayette.

Flora Volunteer Fire Chief Scott Sisson said in his 32 years on the department he has never seen a fire go that quickly.

"It happened so fast," he said, "that we could not implement anything quick enough."

Sisson said his department had returned from storm watch detail around 11:15 Friday night. There were still

firemen on station when the call came in 15 minutes later. Dispatch said that three people were still inside the building and it was an engulfed structure.

"We had phenomenal response time, three to five minutes," Sisson said, "but the house was already 80% involved when we arrived. It was unbelievable."

Wagoner told firefighters that he awoke to smoke detectors going off. It was extremely hot and there was smoke. He said he tried to wake his wife. There was no electricity and he could not locate a phone. In an effort to figure out how to get his family out of there, he said he opened the front door. It was a metal door and shut behind him. He said when he tried to reopen the door, it was so hot he burned his hands.

"All he could think of was getting help for his family," Sisson said.

"Brian gained entry into his garage by breaking a window, then backed his vehicle out through the garage door and headed to his closest neighbor, Jean Callane and Kenny Callane. After calling 911, Wagoner immediately went back to his house and broke windows, yelling for his family in an attempt to get a response."

"Brian was able to tell us exactly how to reach the children and his wife, which saved time," Sisson added.

Firefighters located his daughter in her bedroom, but efforts to revive her were unsuccessful. His son was recovered later in his room upstairs. Mrs. Wagoner was not recovered until morning. She was in the kitchen.

Sisson said had Brian gone back into the residence, there would be four victims instead of three.

"He did the only thing he could and that was to get help for his family," Sisson said. "It was nothing a garden hose was going to fix."

"We can normally knock down a fire under similar circumstances in ten minutes, but this fire took us 35 to 40 minutes."

"There is no average fire," the chief said, "but usually a smoke detector will give you a few minutes head start. This fire was everywhere from the start. You can't be prepared for a catastrophic event like this."

There is a high probability that a lightning strike caused the fire, but that is unofficial, according to Sisson. The fire remains under investigation.

Sisson said he was not aware of any explosion that occurred that night. He speculated that what might have been interpreted as an explosion were windows breaking out or lightning.

"This is the most miserable thing I've ever seen," he said. "It was extra hard because everyone on the department knew this family."

A stress debriefing was held Saturday evening for all firefighters who

were involved. That included 22 members of the Flora VFD and firefighters from the other six volunteer departments in the county, numbering another 45 to 50. Also on the scene were Carroll County EMS, Flora Police, Carroll County Sheriff's Department, and Cass County Ambulance Service.

Two firefighters and a police officer were treated for injuries. Wagoner suffered burns and was treated and released from the hospital.

"We're all taking this extremely hard," said Sisson. "We don't like to lose."

"What is so surreal is that this family is the poster child for fire safety," Sisson said. "They had a plan. They had fire drills, Harrison had an escape ladder from his second story bedroom. But this fire was everywhere so fast. There was no time to implement anything. Everything that could go wrong did. Brian did everything he could do."

County roads sustain flood damage

Commissioners declare county emergency

By Debbie Lowe
Staff writer

Carroll County Commissioners learned about the vast extent of damage to county roads at their Monday morning meeting. County highway engineer Paul Coutts reported that three roads and five culverts were damaged to the point of closure and several suffered damage which will need to be repaired to be safe.

Coutts said CR200N from 125W to 450W, Meridian Rd. from 300N to SR218 and 900N from 175W to 50W

were closed due to the Friday night storms. Two culverts on 125W were damaged and CR450W, from 200N to 300N, and 300N, from 450W to 300W suffered significant damage. Coutts also reported damage to roads 300N, 100N, Division Line Rd. and 175W. He said water took asphalt off of roads within three miles of 200N, 550W and Meridian Rd.

However, Coutts had more bad news. A highway truck was totally damaged when the road base underneath it was

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The Andersons awarded tax abatement

By Debbie Lowe
Staff writer

The lack of new jobs creation in an expansion project was not the only consideration given to The Andersons request for a tax abatement for both real and personal property. It was decided keeping the plant in the county was worth consideration as well.

Carroll County Council awarded tax abatement to the company for three years for personal property and seven years for real property at its Monday meeting. Council members questioned The Andersons representatives present as well as Carroll County Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Daryl Smith about several issues.

At the April council meet-

ing, Jerry Hendress requested from The Andersons a chart of how much property tax the county would forfeit for a three, five and ten year abatement for the expansion, which will cost The Andersons a total of \$1.85 million. That information was not provided.

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DCSC elementary renovation plans change

By Debbie Lowe
Staff writer

After staff at the Camden Early Childhood Center heard where four new unisex restrooms are to be located as part of the upcoming renovation project, they decided the plan is not going to work for them or the students. According to Delphi Community School Corporation Superintendent Ralph Walker, the staff decided the installation will "consume too much instructional space." Walker re-

ported the concern to the board of school trustees at the special Thursday night meeting.

Board members heard the deletion of the restrooms component of the plan will "free up" approximately \$100,000 of money targeted for the project. Walker recommended the board make the change. A unanimous vote made it so.

Walker said he is unsure whether the design architects will be paid for the design of the restrooms now that they

are no longer in the plan. He said he will report to the board after researching the matter.

The school corporation will not be spending less on the project due to the early change. Elementary school principal Bill Shidler's request to use those funds, plus roughly \$24,761 more, for state-of-the-art electronic equipment was approved. He said 39 classrooms, 33 in the elementary school and six at Camden, will be equipped with ceiling or wall-mounted LCD projectors, digital input devices - computers, DVDs, etc., sound integration speakers, personal wireless electronic amplification systems for teachers, and Gomo pads.

"Because these funds are available, I think this would pay big dividends," Shidler said.

Walker said the installation will not be negatively impacted by the construction of

the renovation project at either building.

Textbook adoption

CECC director Carol Coon reported the Indiana State Department of Education is encouraging schools to find alternative and additional resources to enable fourth and fifth-grade students to master the Indiana Academic Standards in Social Studies. Suggestions include the use of computers, other data devices, instructional software, Internet resources, interactive media and other "systematically organized material."

Although Coon presented a list of social studies books, which was approved unanimously, she noted teachers could choose to purchase the books and/or other instructional devices.

Board president Robert Resler clarified to board members that the approval is to grant teachers the authority to purchase books on the list,

but it does not require a purchase.

Coon said teaching methods will not be limited to electronic devices but will likely include a mix of print reading material, projects and interactive media. She likened the broadening of the teaching methods to the time in Camden Elementary history when students learned about a historical figure, dressed in period clothing and gave an ongoing performance at the Camden cabin, built by students in 1979, as if the student were that person. She said students are more likely to retain information using interactive educational methods than simply reading a story and taking a test about the content.

Student handbook changes

Approved changes to the elementary student handbook include changes made in language about attendance and

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A picture is worth a thousand words



County engineer Paul Coutts described the damage to CR200 (the Crooked Road to Flora/Delphi) at the commissioner's meeting Monday, but words cannot do justice to the devastation done to the road during the Friday night deluge. Storms traveled through the county dropping, in some places, more than 5 inches of new water on already saturated ground. The water found its way through the ground, washing away soil and undercutting the road that left the asphalt with no support. Photo provided



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EARLY DEADLINES FOR NEXT WEEK
Due to the Memorial Day Holiday

ALL ADS, NEWS & CORRESPONDENTS DUE BY:
Friday, May 22 @ 12 Noon

The Comet will be published on Wednesday

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