

Progress being made to clean up after storm



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

In the week following the storm that shook southern Ontario and Quebec, causing massive damage, hydro outages and at last count 11 deaths, representatives from the townships of Limerick, Wollaston and Tudor and Cashel provide updates on the aftermath of this destructive storm, also called a derecho, and their continuing cleanup efforts going forward.

The May 21 storm, called a derecho, was very destructive, with winds up to 130 kilometres per hour or more and up to 7-centimetre chunks of hail in some areas. It affected almost half of Canada's population, resulting in downed trees, property damage, massive hydro outages and at last count, 11 deaths. According to the latest estimates by Hydro One as of May 31, power should have been restored to most areas in Wollaston, Limerick and Tudor and Cashel by May 31, with a few areas predicted to have power back by June 3.

Mayor Carl Stefanski of Limerick Township said that it had been a very interesting and stressful time since the storm hit and he called a State of Emergency for his municipality. He said it was amazing to see the community volunteering alongside first responders and their fire department and works department.

?All are coming together in a time of need to clear roads and driveways. Bancroft is stepping up and offering assistance by way of mutual aid and Madoc is offering shower facilities in the new fire hall. A big shoutout to Foodland in Bancroft for donating a pallet of bottled water,? he says.

Stefanski said that an emergency meeting of the Community Emergency Management Coordinator disaster management team was convened on May 24 at 11 a.m. to review what had happened and how to move forward. He noted two items of concern addressed at the meeting; he says that to his knowledge nobody received a cell service alert about the impending weather, and that they'll be following up with the Ministry of the Environment about this.

The storm on May 21 was the first time Environment Canada issued such a thunderstorm warning, as before they had only been issued for tornadoes. However, according to Environment Canada, the threshold for such a warning were winds in excess of 130 kilometres per hour, and since they weren't convinced that the winds would be that strong once they reached certain places like the Peterborough area and other areas further east, the warning wasn't issued. This threshold has subsequently been criticized, and Federal Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Bill Blair said on May 27 that the warning system will be reviewed for future usage, in terms of the way it is worded and to how many people it's sent out to.

Stefanski also alleges that none of the provincial candidates reached out to Limerick or Tudor and Cashel and they wonder why. He revealed some additional concerns going forward post storm.

?With time the debris will dry out and may become an additional fire hazard. The fire chief is aware of this and will be vigilant. Infrastructure has been damaged and requires repair and most probably replacement. The roads that Hydro One and Bell Canada are working on will have to be restricted to speed up restoration. We'll also be promoting Neighbourhood Watch and we'll be doing an aerial check to locate anyone who may be trapped or injured,? he says.

Wellness checks should be conducted by Community Care, according to Stefanski, as the OPP are stretched to the limit during the storm's aftermath. He estimates that over 240 utility poles were destroyed in Limerick alone, and that approximately 200 to 300 extra Hydro personnel will be arriving in the next few days to help restore service. He also made special mention of the owner of the property diagonal to Trudy's Place for allowing Hydro One and Bell Canada to place their materials and equipment while they work to restore their services.

?Prior to the event, Limerick Township was in the process of arranging a delegation to AMO with the Minister of Infrastructure [Kinga Surma]. Now we will have more requests and questions to present,? he says.

Victoria Tisdale, Limerick's clerk and treasurer, said on May 25 they had brought in horse back mounted units to clear obstructions and look for injured or missing people on the trails in Limerick. Cindy Fuerth is the CEO and general manager of the Ontario Mounted Special Service Unit Safety Support Company, which is an Emergency Response Team for Hastings County, who have trained for search and rescues and trained with the Arizona border patrol. They also have air scent tracking horses and they patrol a lot of events. She says that Old Hastings Road looked like a war zone when she talked to Bancroft This Week on May 26. She said that the mounted units had covered 27 kilometres the day before and at least that number of kilometres that day.

?I've got some of the mounted units out and they've located a stolen vehicle, they've done all kinds of things. They're looking for obstructions, injured or missing people, loss of life. They can get through places that we can't walk. We haven't found anybody yet, but we're still looking to ensure nobody is out there,? she says.

Fuerth said they've also been able to search the Land'escapes acreage owned by Ben Samann, who opened it up for them. She said that he and his team cut a path for them to get through to the north end of Limerick Lake.

?So, Ben worked with us, which was great. I can't say enough about him or his crew,? she says.

Tudor and Cashel Mayor Libby Clarke told Bancroft This Week on May 27 that she was trapped at her summer residence for two days in North Frontenac when the storm hit. She said that correspondence with CAO Nancy Carrol was difficult with sporadic cell service, no Internet and hydro lines being down.

?It was a horrible experience and when I returned and saw how Tudor and Cashel had been hit by the same weather pattern I was devastated. Tudor and Cashel is in a state of emergency and the CEMC group met to discuss the windstorm cleanup. Hydro One continues to work to restore power to all our residents and our roads crews are working tirelessly to get brush and limbs off our roads. Our municipal roads are passable and checks are being made to ensure our vulnerable residents are safe. They say it takes a village and it was heartwarming to hear how everyone was pitching in and helping one another to get things cleaned up. A huge thank you goes out to all the community members who joined together to help each other,? she says.

Sheryl Switzer is the deputy clerk and treasurer in Tudor and Cashel, and echoed Clarke's comments that the May 21 storm had caused extensive damage.

?We are requesting that brush not be brought to the waste sites. Instead, it can be taken to Limerick Township at 89 Limerick Lake Road as well as a second site that will be established in the coming days on Hwy 62 approximately 4 kilometres north of West Road and 5 kilometres south of South Jordan Lake Road on the west side of the highway. Signage will be posted when this site is

available,? she says.

Switzer says that while the Internet is working, the email server at the municipal office is currently down, and that any emails will be returned as soon as possible once it has been restored. Any residents needing Internet or a place to charge their devices can come to the community centre during regular office hours to do so, and the water tap for potable water located at the side of the municipal building will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. She reminds everyone that with the increased demand for water, that those using the tap should remain aware that the township is on a well so to take only what they need and not excessively.

?If residents do have access to Internet, please watch for updates and further information posted to our website and our Facebook page. We wish to thank everyone that has assisted with cleanup thus far. It is amazing to see how our community members come together in times of need. We appreciate everyone's patience during this trying time,? she says.

Mayor Lynn Kruger of Wollaston Township also mentioned there was a CEMC disaster management meeting on May 24, and that their fire chief Jack Donnelly attended and that it pertained to the cleanup of the three communities of Wollaston, Limerick and Tudor and Cashel. She notes that she was not part of the meeting. She asks that all stakeholders needing information refer to the Wollaston Township Facebook page, the municipal website at www.wollastontownship.ca, by calling 613-337-5731 or by contacting any member of council.

?The work is well underway [for the cleanup]. I declared a state of emergency on May 22 when advised from those with boots on the ground that it was much worse than first anticipated. The amount of devastation for our small municipality is unexplainable and totally heartbreaking, with some areas being hardly recognizable. Our thoughts are with those that have experienced loss at this time. Thank you goes out to the endless amount of volunteers, staff and contractors that stepped up to aid in the cleanup for the betterment of our municipality,? she says. ?We are truly fortunate to have such a caring community.?