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One year later

Midland continues its recovery from the May 2020 mid-Michigan dam failures



A vast, sandy meadow covers much of the lakebed once covered by Sanford Lake, as seen Friday near the Sanford Dam. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

After the rain

A year later, flood victims look ahead

STELLA GOVITZ
for the Daily News

It was, in a word, catastrophic. The May 19 flooding that followed the mid-Michigan dam failures that devastated communities from Beaverton to Midland was the worst in generations. Thousands of people were displaced, and thousands of homes were destroyed. This life-changing disaster also gave rise to countless stories of compassion, humanity and, amazingly, optimism. Here are five of them.

The veteran: Defending his home

Fifty-two-year-old Terry Hall lights a cigarette, the empty lake with nothing but the Tittabawassee River gently flowing in the background. Patio chairs, a garage, a grill and a small charming house are part of the property that Terry calls home. He had to live in his conversion van after the flooding, and his home needed to be remodeled.

"It could have been worse," the veteran says.

As the flood waters started to rise that fateful day, Terry dismissed the



Terry Hall says his two decades of Army training made him accustomed to roughing it — something that was required when flood waters displaced him from home.

evacuation warnings. He thought it was impossible that the water would do any severe damage to his house, which sits nine feet above Sanford Lake's standard level. He stayed on his property and watched the chaos unfold.

When Terry realized the water would, in fact, damage the inside of his home, he shut off the gas and electricity but continued to defend his property. The water reached three feet outside and 10 inches inside, requiring him to completely gut the place. This also forced him to live without a stove or fridge for nearly six months and rely primarily on grilled food.

While these conditions

would be quite difficult for many people, it wasn't a big deal for Terry. His two decades of Army training made him accustomed to roughing it.

"As rough as it was here, it was nothing compared to my time overseas," Terry says. "My 21 years of service probably put me in a better position than other people."

Even though he acknowledges the impact the flood had on others' lives, Terry views it as a sort of personal rebirth. Through various veterans assistance programs, FEMA and Home Depot gift cards, he remodeled his house, with renovations totaling around \$50,000.

SEE VICTIMS, 4B

New cost estimates for restoration of dams, lakes

Sanford dam and lake estimated to be restored by 2025

MITCHELL KUKULKA
Midland Daily News

For the past year, the Four Lakes Task Force has been one of the leading forces in helping mid-Michigan recover from the dam failures.

The task force is the delegated authority working on behalf of Midland and Gladwin counties to oversee the dams and lakes along the Tittabawassee River system.

Since last May, the Four Lakes Task Force (FLTF) has been

working to secure a future for the the dam system and its lakes in Midland and Gladwin counties, through efforts such as debris clean-up, stabilization work and fundraising.

As of the end of 2020, FLTF had received commitments of over \$50 million in funding from federal, state and private sources to support recovery efforts, studies and engineering work.

"We've raised — privately and publicly — funds to basically stabilize these dam systems," said FLTF president David Kepler. "While we're not through the

SEE RESTORATION, 6A

State, local entities went into overdrive to repair infrastructure

MDOT, Midland road commission partnered to repair roads, bridges

DAN CHALK
chalk@mdn.net

As the associate region engineer for operations for the Michigan Department of Transportation's (MDOT) Bay Region, Midland resident Kim Zimmer was already busy implementing MDOT's COVID-19 safety protocols at this time a year ago.

But in the days leading up to and the days following May 19, 2020, Zimmer's life got a lot busier.

With the Edenville Dam and Sanford Dam both failing in quick succession that evening following days of heavy rain, Bay Region MDOT staff went into overdrive to barricade flooded sections of roads, monitor the condition of bridges, reroute traffic, and generally keep motorists and pedestrians safe.

"For days after the (dam failures), we were working around the clock," said Zimmer, who has worked for

SEE REPAIR, 6A

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Opioid Management

Opioids are drugs that work in the brain to help control pain. They are frequently prescribed by your doctor after a surgical procedure. Opioids can also make you feel happy or relaxed and can be associated with misuse or dependence. To decrease the likelihood of misuse, follow the direction of your doctor and pharmacist. It is important to keep patient specific opioid medication away from others; unused or expired medication should be properly disposed of or dropped off at a drop box. Local pharmacies and local law enforcement provide year-round drop box locations. For more information on how to dispose of your unused prescriptions properly, ask your medical or dental professional.



Midland lawmaker weighs in on state of Dam Safety Program

DAN CHALK
chalk@mdn.net

As the one-year anniversary of the disastrous failure of the Edenville and Sanford dams approaches, State Rep. Annette Glenn, R-Midland, is spending a lot of time these days examining the state's Dam Safety Program.

Glenn is chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee for the Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), which administers the Dam Safety Program.

"As soon as we got the budget out, we have been focusing on dams every single week," Glenn told the Daily News on Wednesday. "I think we'll be spending a significant amount of time on dams."

In response to the flooding caused by the dam failures, which damaged or destroyed thousands of homes and businesses and forced more than 10,000 to evacuate their homes, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer appointed a 19-member Dam Safety Task Force to

come up with recommendations for improving the Dam Safety Program.

After five months of meetings, that task force issued a report to Whitmer that contained 86 recommendations.

In the meantime, a five-member independent panel appointed by Whitmer to investigate the dam failures is expected to release its findings by the end of this year. That panel was appointed last June after Glenn, among others, had called for an independent group to conduct the investigation instead of EGLE itself, as Whitmer had originally intended.

Glenn feels strongly that once the findings of the investigation are released, the task force needs to reconvene in order to take those findings into account.

And she was dismayed to learn on Wednesday during an update given to her subcommittee by EGLE Director Liesl Clark and Dam Safety Program Supervisor Luke Trumble that EGLE has no plans for



Part of Edenville Dam remains as the water level of Wixom Lake is still extremely low Friday in Edenville. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

the task force to reconvene.

"It's concerning that they wouldn't take into account the investigation and have the task force meet and reconsider that," Glenn said. "If they (the independent panel) have done an in-depth investigation, their findings should be taken into account heavily."

Clark and Trumble took questions from the subcommittee after giving their report, and one key point that arose from the questions was the fact that dam owners are not currently required to hold a license to maintain a dam

in Michigan.

"If they make any changes or apply to make upgrades, that requires a permit (or license)," Glenn said. "But (for a dam) to just exist and stay as is, there's not a permit that has to be renewed."

Glenn said her subcommittee is committed to giving the Dam Safety Program the funding that it needs to do its job effectively.

"In the first draft of the budget, we appropriated \$15 million for the dam safety fund. That can be used for addressing

disasters or preventing disasters," she said. "One other recommendation was to establish funding of a revolving loan grant program. Those are just starting points, and we'll continue to look for ways to fund our aging infrastructure."

The Daily News also interviewed Trumble following Wednesday's subcommittee meeting.

In terms of the Four Lakes Task Force's ongoing efforts to restore the Sanford and Edenville dams, along with the Secord and Smallwood dams that are also along the Tittabawassee River, Trumble told the Daily News that the Dam Safety Program generally takes a neutral position in such matters.

"If it can be done in an environmentally appropriate way that maintains the safety and integrity of the dams, then we're supportive (of the FLTF's efforts to restore the dams)," Trumble said.

But when asked about the recent history of dams

in Michigan, he said there is a definite trend of moving away from building new dams or maintaining existing ones.

"From the 1920s through the 1950s, the U.S. and Michigan were building dams," he said. "In the 1960s and 1970s, that leveled out, and from the 1980s through the 2000s, there's not much new dam construction to speak of. On-river dams, there's not many being built in Michigan at all. The trend has gone away from dam construction to either maintenance or removal. There's been a big uptick in dam removal in Michigan and the U.S."

Looking at the Dam Safety Program as a whole, Trumble is encouraged by the fact that the state has doubled the numbers of the program staff since the dam failures last May.

"It's unfortunate that it took a disaster to jumpstart (these changes), but (we are glad to see things moving in the right direction)," Trumble said.

A year later, Gladwin County residents awash with regret

Some still remain without water since dam failures

TEREASA NIMS
for the Daily News

At 1:30 a.m. May 16 last year, Bill Vasicek remembers a severe storm moving in. Two days, later he took refuge in his higher ground hilltop garage and watched floodwaters steal his belongings.

One year after a historic flood that followed the mid-Michigan dam failures, Vasicek along with others are rebuilding. Some are asking if they should rebuild, others have already bid adieu to their properties and still, wells are failing because of the event.

Gladwin County Emergency Manager Bob North said the wells were hit hard in the county. Some failures haven't been realized because people are still coming back.

"They are slowly coming back," said North of the residents.

One of North's focus is on the wells.

Hundreds and hundreds of wells went out

The county received a grant for wells at the Billings Township and Secord Township fire departments that were hard hit in the flood. Neither could pull water from the low-level lake, so the wells were imperative for a water supply, North said.

An estimated 600 wells reportedly went out, and 220 have been repaired. But there are others, according to Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency Executive Director Jill Sutton, that are yet to be fixed. She said some residents have been without water since the flood hit.

Even with the help, Sutton said there are challenges with digging the wells – citing that just recently one well dig required a depth of 435 feet down.

Thinking forward

In addition to dealing



Bill Vasicek poses for a portrait Wednesday, April 7 inside his home in Hope. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

with the well failures in the county, the emergency operations department has been working on a plan that thinks forward. "I think we've gained a great deal of knowledge," North said, regarding the impact from the water drop from the north end of the county. "On the Cedar and Tobacco side, a lot of water came downhill from a lot of different sources."

He said the emergency department now has a much better knowledge of what it entails to keep people safer and ways to get them the help following such an event.

North said the flooding has taught many residents that if they aren't prepared to be on their own for seven days, they aren't prepared for such a disaster.

Help from home and afar

The Federal Emergency Management Agency and local Michigan Community Action Agency representatives have taken hold of efforts to help those impacted by the flooding.

"We were very happy there were no casualties," North said. "People in the community were very aware."

He notes that many people from all over came forward to help affected areas in Gladwin County. Volunteers spent 5,900 volunteer hours helping deliver aid, muck out

houses and getting help to people. Sutton said the free labor and donated time made a huge impact.

Gladwin County Long term Disaster Case Manager Carla Long has been working with those needing relief. She assists with FEMA appeals, applications for help, water access, food, and supply needs.

Homeowners still dealing with recovery

"This has been a journey with the homeowners," Long said. "They are still going through the steps."

Long said for many it is a mourning process, still. Some have decided to rebuild, others are on the fence about if they should or if they can afford to rebuild.

"So many are still in the decision state," Long said. "There are so many moving parts and not knowing where to go financially."

Sutton said FEMA has set aside \$5,741,816 for Gladwin County. Of that, \$5,625,058 is for housing assistance. There was also \$4,216,808 for housing repairs. There were 1,101 primary homes damaged in the county from the flood and many claims have been forwarded to FEMA. There is a FEMA maximum grant of \$35,500 and Sutton said 17 people have qualified for that. Other people are receiving grants of

\$10,000 and \$5,000, depending on their needs. Such grants are only for primary homes.

There are still claims and appeals pending with FEMA. In addition, there is about \$300,000 in donations that is being used.

"We don't know how many people have moved into their primary homes," Sutton said.

Most Gladwin homes deemed fixable

Sutton said most of the homes in Gladwin were deemed fixable.

"Some people are choosing not to put money back into their homes," she said.

"We're still in the regrouping stage," she said. "We're slowly getting back to normal."

Yet, Sutton notes it can take up to 10 years to truly come back from such a catastrophic event.

Those who received money said it offered them a leg up to fix their home.

"I'm doing just dandy," said Vasicek, who received FEMA money. "I'm getting my bathroom rebuilt."

The Gladwin County resident said with the help of Long, he was able to get money awarded from FEMA. He credits Long with helping him through the whole process and making him feel like he wasn't alone in the ordeal.

SEE RESIDENTS, 3B

Dam failure lawsuits head to trial

Some cases against Boyce have been dropped

MITCHELL KUKULKA
Midland Daily News

Litigation targeting former dam owner Boyce Hydro is still underway in Michigan's court system.

Following the disastrous mid-Michigan dam failures on May 19, 2020, many local residents blamed Boyce for the incident, with some lawsuits also targeting other state agencies as well.

Below is a list of active lawsuits filed against Boyce Hydro and other parties in response to the dam failures and the flooding that followed. All listed lawsuits were filed in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan.

On May 22, Kimberly Borchard, Timothy Dana and Holly Kovacs sued Boyce Hydro, its subsidiaries and co-owners, along with the Four Lakes Task Force (FLTF), on counts of negligence, nuisance, trespass, strict liability and intentional infliction of emotional distress. Charges against FLTF were dropped in May 2020. On March 31, 2021, it was decided the case will go to trial. A settlement conference is set for Oct. 6, 2021 before Judge Thomas Ludington, with a jury trial set for March 1, 2022.

On May 22, Carol Clarkson and three other plaintiffs sued Boyce Hydro, its subsidiaries and co-owners on two counts of negligence, gross negligence, common law trespass, statutory trespass and trespass-nuisance. The lawsuit also initially named the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy as defendants, though the plaintiffs voluntarily dismissed those charges on June 22. A settlement conference is set for Aug. 10, 2021 before Judge Thomas Ludington, with a jury trial set for Feb. 1, 2022.

On May 27, Robert Woods and Holly Johnson sued the FLTF, Michigan's Attorney General Dana Nessel, Midland County, Gladwin County, the State of Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy and the Department of Natural Resources, Boyce Hydro and all its subsidiaries and owner Lee Mueller on counts of negligence and gross negligence, trespass and two counts of deprivation of property. FLTF was dismissed as a party on Oct. 20, 2020. A settlement conference is set for July 21, 2021 before Judge Thomas Ludington, with a jury trial set for Feb. 1, 2022.

Cases dismissed

While some litigation efforts are going forward, a few will not be making it to trial.

On May 27, John Colburn sued Boyce Hydro, its subsidiaries and co-owners on a total of four counts, including negligence, strict liability, nuisance (public and private) and trespass. The case was closed on Oct. 1 after Colburn filed a voluntary dismissal.

On July 13, Charles Kinzel and Debra Kroening filed a class action lawsuit against Boyce Hydro, its subsidiaries and co-owners on counts of negligence, strict liability for abnormally dangerous activity, statutory trespass and nuisance. The case was dismissed without prejudice on Dec. 17, 2020.

On May 22, Whitney Cable and three other plaintiffs sued Boyce Hydro, its subsidiaries and co-owners on counts of negligence, nuisance and trespass. The case was dismissed on March 2, 2021.

On June 5, Attorney General Dana Nessel, along with MDNR and EGLE sued Boyce Hydro, its subsidiaries and co-owners in the U.S. District Court for Western District of Michigan. Litigation was halted when Boyce Hydro filed for bankruptcy on July 31. A stay of proceedings was ordered on March 17, 2021.

'We are recovering and we will bring back all the lakes'

After years of suffering under the poor stewardship of Sanford, Edenville, Smallwood and Secord dams, the worst-case scenario happened when two dams breached, leaving the counties and lake communities and our downstream neighbors to deal with the disaster. The federal and state regulatory agencies were responsive, after the failure, but their systems were not structured to deal

with failures of a privately-owned dam, and especially its owner. But we all responded. It has been one year since the rain, flooding, and dam failures. Working with property owners; our communities; our county, state and federal officials and their agencies; we



Dave Kepler

are recovering and will bring back all the lakes. That is and has been the mission of Four Lakes Task Force, and the lake associations since the May 19, 2020 breach of the Boyce-owned Edenville dam, destruction of the Sanford dam, and the federally mandated lowering of Secord and Smallwood lakes for inspection and repairs.

A year later, Four Lakes Task Force, the delegated authority of

Midland and Gladwin counties to restore the lake levels, has published the Four Lakes Restoration Plan. This is a comprehensive technical report describing our path forward to bring back the dams by 2026 and recover the surrounding ecosystem that was damaged by the flooding. See our website at www.four-lakes-taskforce-mi.com for the full report.

FLTF has assembled a world-class team of

experts to develop and implement this plan. Their collective conclusion is that restoring the lakes is feasible and necessary. There would have been no path to having future lakes if Midland and Gladwin county leaders had not stepped forward to acquire the properties and stabilize the situation on the ground, with support from the state and federal governments.

Lake restoration

comes at a cost; by our estimates approximately \$250 million. It will require special assessments of property owners, loans from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and we need additional significant grants from the federal and state governments to make the effort affordable to many of our neighbors on the lake.

Yet we are fully

See LAKES, 9B

Midland gave local: Foundation head thanks community

Thank you for giving local, Midland! We're excited to report that the Midland Area Community Foundation's 24-hour giving day, Give Local Midland, held May 4, brought in close to \$450,000 through donations, a matching pool, and prizes. Over its eight-year history, Give Local Midland has brought a cumulative total of over \$2.2 million to local nonprofits.



Sharon Mortensen

Thank you for giving and sharing about this important 24-hour event that happens once a year. Give Local provides nonprofits one day each year to focus their efforts on building long-term sustainability through their endowment fund at the Midland Area Community Foundation. Your support

of nonprofit endowment funds helps enrich and improve the quality of life and result in long-term community transformation.

Your Midland Area Community Foundation believes in the power of collective giving and handles all of the administrative details and fees associated with the giving day, meaning donors' dollars go even farther. Nonprofit endowment funds received gifts ranging from \$5 to \$12,000, reminding us that everyone can be a philanthropist.

I welcome and encourage anyone who wants to learn more about your local community foundation to reach out to me directly. On behalf of the 72 endowed funds that participated in this year's Give Local Midland, thank you for giving where you live.

Sharon Mortensen is president and CEO of the Midland Area Community Foundation.

The value of public art to Midland

A 2017 article in Second Wave Media addressing Midland's changing future discussed the importance of building a sense of place. The author interviewed a number of residents who laid out the challenge of creating 'amenities for the millennial generation' and the goal of 'making Midland even better' with improved housing, businesses, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

What was sadly missing from this equation was public art.

Why should public art matter to everyone? Here are five big reasons.

First, public art adds meaning to our community and it is a reflection of our city. Public art celebrates the past, it reflects the present, and it predicts the future. It connects ideas and areas of importance. Consider the truly unique installation at the Founder's Garden near the Loons stadium – a sculptural installment that engages the viewer in the power of science and connects an artist's vision to our Dow chemistry roots. Midland is a community of creative people and modern explorers, and public art expresses this community identity in a way that everyone can understand.



Laura Vosejka

Second, public art asks us to pay attention in a different way. It encourages everyone to see their environment through a new lens. Public art is engaging socially, you can see it and touch it, you can eat your lunch with it, you can even help to create it. How many of you have posed with The Family sculpture in Chipewassee Park near the Tridge? Or played one of the gorgeous painted pianos last summer? And starting this month, you can help to create the community mural at Creative 360. While viewing beautiful art in a museum is a wonderful thing, there is something satisfying about throwing oneself into the same space as the artwork,

SEE ART, 9B

In the garden with Ed: Itching to work in the garden? Think ornamentation

Here's an idea to satisfy your gardening passions as you wait for temperatures of soil and air to warm sufficiently for safe planting of annual plants and most seeds:



Edward Hutchison

Look closely at online and local stores for what the garden industry calls "ornamentation," a boring term for three-dimensional objects that provide a happy jolt when you and visitors happen to notice it as something unexpected in the immediate surroundings.

Older gardeners might recall the one-dimensional butt ladies. These were often plywood cut-outs, usually of an overweight woman or man, in garish clothes, bending over for a gardening chore. I'm not suggesting homemade or crude stuff like that here, but rather an item that is big or small, that the eye notices because it is a visual surprise when spotted.

It seems out of place, but in a good way, and says to the visitor – "Look here friend" asking "bet you didn't expect me?"

With this brief article, I am inviting readers to use non-plant material to add color, shape and form – and better yet, humor – to your garden and



Crispin welcomes from his guard post just above eye level stationed in a young pin oak tree near the author's back door.

overall landscape. The point is to cause you and others to take a second look when something

See GARDEN, 9B

YOUR VIEW

Reader disappointed with GOP lawmaker

To the editor:
This is in response to a letter I received recently from our State Sen. Jim Stamas, in which he attempts to justify the GOP 39 bills dealing with election reform:

Dear Jim,
Your claim that the GOP 39 so-called election reform bills protect and support our election system is disputed by quite a few sources, including the New York Times, Bridge Magazine and Detroit Free Press, and many Michigan television stations.

There are many others I am not citing here. In short, Jim, I believe that had the GOP fared better in the November election, you and your party would not now be putting forth these bills or claiming the election system needs reform. In fact, the election may have been one of the fairest elections ever conducted, overseen by experienced and qualified officials (from both major parties), and (according to over 60 court cases) with little to no evidence of fraud.

Your letter, to quote Judge Judy, "pees on my leg and tells me it's raining." In short, your lack of integrity in this matter is transparent.

LARRY LEVY
Midland

Reader defends Republican representatives

To the editor:
I strongly disagree with Greg Mayville's letter to the editor on May 10, in which he asserts that our Republican representatives in Michigan are far right or radical. The fact that liberal politicians are taking full advantage of the changes to our voting procedures during the pandemic and now want to keep and increase those changes seems much more radical than the idea of going back to the standards that were upheld prior to the pandemic. Disrupting constitutionally set practices should not be something thrown out with the pandemic bathwater. I take issue with people labeling traditional standards as radical.

I encourage our community members to be on guard about allowing new prevailing ideas to run rough-shod over our long-proven standards of any nature. Our laws and practices were created with many years of thought and trial and error. To dismantle so much so quickly is irresponsible and disrespectful of carefully laid framework put in place to empower the people to act freely. Change is always a good thing to consider; but consideration should be made carefully, not with the knee-jerk reaction that our current societal norms seem to be demanding.

BARBARA OSTERGAARD
Midland

Reader grateful for Earth Action Expo organizers

To the editor:
I attended the Earth Action Expo at H. H. Dow High School on Saturday, May 1 and had a wonderful time! Cynthia Roberts and the Go Green club orchestrated an outdoor event that allowed participants to walk station to station to learn about relevant and Earth friendly discoveries and options.

My husband and I learned so much about native plants, solar and wind energy, climate change and resolutions, electric cars and bikes, the importance of bees and bats, community gardens and markets as well as recycling. We spent at least two hours listening to very knowledgeable, articulate, passionate people that were very excited to share their researched information. We also received so many fun freebies! We took home bags made from used T-shirts, seeds, white pine samplings, coloring pages and magazines for kids, peanut butter bird feeders and so much more! It was a safe and very informational event. It was a marvelous event and I hope it becomes a yearly one! Thank you so much to everyone involved!

MELINDA PLAUGHER
Midland

SHARE YOUR VIEW: The Midland Daily News welcomes letters to the editor from people who live within our readership area. Letters provide a forum for the public to express their views. Letters should be short and to the point, and should not exceed 350 words. The paper will edit letters for length, conciseness and clarity. Letters should include the writer's first and last name and hometown address and a way for the newspaper to contact the letter writer, preferably an email address or daytime telephone number, to verify the author and should there be a question about the submission. If a topic has been thoroughly debated in the letters column, subsequent letters will not be published if they do not add new information or ideas to the debate. Letters that are libelous, malicious, inaccurate, in bad taste, demonstrably false, contain conspiracy theories or those that make personal attacks on private or public people, will not be published. All submissions will be posted with a first and last name along with the city of residence of the author. Under most circumstances, authors will be limited to one published letter every three weeks. Letters that exceed the 350-word count and/or whose authorship cannot be determined will not be published. Letters can be submitted online at ourmidland.com or by email to midlanddailynews@gmail.com



Sanford Lake Park is surrounded by a meadow formerly covered by Sanford Lake, as seen Friday. (Katy Kildee/kkildede@mdn.net)



Sanford Lake Park is surrounded by a meadow formerly covered by Sanford Lake, as seen Friday. (Katy Kildee/kkildede@mdn.net)

RESTORATION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

woods, by 2022 — probably mid-year — we'll have basically accomplished the goal of securing the safety of the community. During that time, we've been able to plan for the future of the dams."

As of this past March, Kepler said stabilization efforts on the Secord

and Smallwood dams are "basically done."

On Nov. 13, FLTF and Boyce Hydro reached a settlement regarding condemnation litigation. In accordance with the settlement agreement, the counties would obtain ownership of the Boyce properties. In January 2021, ownership of the dam properties and lakes along the Tittabawassee River system was

officially transferred from Boyce Hydro to the FLTF.

Kepler said the current timeline estimates propose the completion of repair work on Edenville Dam — and the potential return of Wixom Lake — by 2026. Reconstruction work on Sanford Dam, and the return of Sanford Lake, will likely be accomplished by 2025, and Secord and

Smallwood dams are set to be repaired by the spring season of 2024.

In September 2020, FLTF released an action plan detailing the potential costs of repairing the dam system. According to initial estimates by GEI Consultants, the probable cost to reconstruct and rehabilitate the Secord, Smallwood, Edenville and Sanford dams was calculated to

be about \$338 million.

Kepler said that cost estimate was changed significantly in the past eight months.

Project cost estimates for the Secord and Smallwood dams have both increased, with Secord rising for \$24 million to \$25 million, and Smallwood raising from \$14 million to \$18 million.

The two larger dams, however, are looking at

significantly less costly repairs than the original estimates. Cost projections for Edenville Dam repair work dropped from \$208 million to \$121 million, and estimates for Sanford Dam dropped from \$92 million to \$51 million, according to the most recent estimates.

Overall, the planning number has dropped from \$338 million to \$215 million, Kepler said.

REPAIR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

MDOT for almost 22 years. "Bridge engineers were continuously monitoring the bridge infrastructure to make sure it was safe. ... Other agencies were bringing us extra barricades because the event was so large in magnitude.

During those tense days, MDOT's communication with first responders, partner agencies, and the public was crucial.

"When the storm started happening, we were monitoring the situation for water over the roads," recalled Zimmer, who is also the emergency management coordinator for MDOT's Bay Region. "As the rainfall intensity increased and the dams broke, our maintenance first responders were texting me about how they were rerouting traffic. As I would get all that information from the field staff as they were closing roads, I was working with law enforcement and 911 Central Dispatch and relaying that information back out to the public."

Just like the quick and brave actions of firefighters, police officers and other first responders, the work of MDOT helped to ensure that not a single life was lost due to the flooding.

"Our response success was heavily dependent on communication and our relationships with road commissions, 911 dispatch centers, and law enforcement," Zimmer said. "Thankfully, we had no fatalities with this incident."

And for that blessing, she is thankful in part to her fellow MDOT employees.

"I think our staff had excellent response, teamwork, communication and partnerships with everybody to ensure the safety and mobility of our residents and citizens," Zimmer said.

MDOT puts in



A vast, sandy meadow covers much of the lakebed once covered by Sanford Lake Friday near the Sanford Dam. (Katy Kildee/kkildede@mdn.net)

overtime to repair roads, bridges

And as emergency response gave way to flood recovery, MDOT's work was only beginning.

Major roadways and bridges, such as on M-30 and US-10, had to be repaired in order for both local and regional traffic to be able to continue.

Conventional timelines for approval of construction projects had to be put aside. A high sense of urgency was called for.

Mount Pleasant-based MDOT construction engineer Shaun Bates, a 19-year employee, served as project manager for seven emergency projects related to the flooding.

Bates said he and his co-workers knew they simply had to step up and do the job, which often meant working long shifts.

They knew that many people had been dealt a much tougher hand.

"I've never seen something like this, and a lot of construction engineers will never experience something of this nature," Bates said. "It was very stressful, but very rewarding to help people get back to some normalcy. So, the long hours, the stress, it was nothing compared to the people who lost their homes or their businesses.

"We just sucked it up and said, 'We could be in their shoes. We are going to get this done as soon as possible so they can start the healing process.'"

One of the highest-pri-

ority emergency projects was repairing the US-10 westbound and eastbound bridges over Sanford Lake, which included removing debris, addressing scouring around the piers, and repaving the roadway.

Fisher Contracting of Midland was awarded the contract for that US-10 project, which began on May 23, less than four full days after the dam failures. One of the bridges reopened by June 4 with one lane of traffic going in each direction, and both bridges were open by June 18.

MDOT also helped the Village of Sanford with the repair of the Saginaw Road bridge and 1,000 feet of damaged roadway.

That bridge reopened in late October, restoring a second key east-west corridor along with US-10.

Meanwhile, work was under way several miles north, where the flooding had wiped out the east-west Curtis Road bridge as well as two north-south bridges on M-30.

The M-30 bridge over the Tittabawassee River in Edenville reopened on Sept. 17, the Curtis Road bridge reopened on Nov. 12, and, finally, the M-30 bridge over the Tobacco River, just into Gladwin County, reopened on March 11, 2021.

That last bridge was also overlaid with hot mix asphalt this past week, a step that Bates noted could not be done during the winter because asphalt plants were closed at that time.

Midland road commission works hard to restore access for residents

Just like with MDOT, the Midland County Road Commission (MCRC), under Managing Director Jon Myers, has had its work cut out over for it over the past year.

"Right after the

flooding, there were so many roads closed down, so our key was trying to get traffic moving again," Myers said. "Bridges that were closed affected mobility in the county a ton, so right off the bat, we had to make sure the bridges were safe.

"Our crews worked a lot of hours. We also had a lot of people in the office working with federal agencies hand in hand. In fact, we're still working with them to get funding approved for a lot of locations."

Myers is grateful for the help that MDOT has given with many of the repair projects, such as with the Curtis Road bridge restoration.

"The state leadership directed (MDOT) to assist everybody as much as possible," he said. "They had their own repairs to do, but they jumped in and helped us out a ton. Their oversight is a lot more experienced than ours, so these emergency projects were a lot easier for them to handle than us."

Another key project for the MCRC last year was to repair a stretch of Poseyville Road in Midland Township that was heavily damaged by the flooding. Myers also said the MCRC recently got funding approved from the Federal Highway Administration to repave Poseyville all the way from Gordonville north to the Midland city limits.

Myers said the only section of road in the county that is still closed due to last year's flooding is on Eight Mile Road south of Saginaw Road, due to a damaged culvert. He hopes to have that section reopened by late summer.

"We're confident we will get the funding for it, so we're going to go forward with the project. We hope to start work here soon," Myers said.

LEGISLATIVE ROLL CALL

Senate Bill 378, Authorize dependent income tax credit: Passed 25 to 10 in the Senate

To authorize a \$500 non-refundable state income tax credit for each dependent age 18 and below in 2022 through 2025.

31 Sen. Kevin Daley, R - Attica, Y

32 Sen. Kenneth Horn, R - Frankenmuth, Y

36 Sen. Jim Stamas, R - Midland, Y

Senate Bill 79, Ban state from imposing vaccine "passport" mandates: Passed 20 to 15 in the Senate

To prohibit the state health and welfare department from spending any money to develop, implement, or enforce any proposal or process to impose vaccine "passport" requirements. This was an amendment to a budget bill, along with a ban on imposing facemask mandates on anyone under age 18.

31 Sen. Kevin Daley, R - Attica, Y

32 Sen. Kenneth Horn, R - Frankenmuth, Y

36 Sen. Jim Stamas, R - Midland, Y

Senate Bill 428, Ban imposing face mask mandates on toddlers: Passed 20 to 15 in the Senate

To prohibit the state or a local health department from imposing a face mask mandate on children younger than age 5.

31 Sen. Kevin Daley, R - Attica, Y

32 Sen. Kenneth Horn, R - Frankenmuth, Y

36 Sen. Jim Stamas, R - Midland, Y

House Bill 4082, Revise restriction on administration reshuffling appropriated money: Passed 58 to 49 in the House

To restrict a state "administrative board" increasing or decreasing an item of appropriation without permission from legislative appropriation committees if the amount is more than 3% or \$125,000 and won't change the appropriation by more than \$200,000. The bill comes after Gov. Gretchen Whitmer used this device to repurpose some \$600 million appropriated in the 2019-2020 fiscal year budget.

95 Rep. Amos O'Neal, D - Saginaw, N

96 Rep. Timothy Beson, R - Bay City, Y

97 Rep. Jason Wentworth, R - Clare, Y

98 Rep. Annette Glenn, R - Midland, Y

99 Rep. Roger Hauck, R - Mount Pleasant, Y

House Bill 4669, Create transportation bond repayment sinking fund: Passed 58 to 49 in the House

To create a transportation bond repayment sinking fund, to hold money to be used only to repay road debt incurred by the Whitmer, Granholm and Engler administrations. No new road debt could be incurred without depositing an equal amount in the sinking fund up to \$234 million annually, over several years if necessary. The House Fiscal Agency reports the state currently owes \$1.159 billion to bond holders, which currently uses \$143 million of road tax revenue. A House-passed supplemental spending bill (House Bill 4420) would appropriate \$626 million for the sinking fund.

95 Rep. Amos O'Neal, D - Saginaw, N

96 Rep. Timothy Beson, R - Bay City, Y

97 Rep. Jason Wentworth, R - Clare, Y

98 Rep. Annette Glenn, R - Midland, Y

99 Rep. Roger Hauck, R - Mount Pleasant, Y

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INJURY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

to work it and do the exercises they gave me to do, because I want to be back (on the softball field) as soon as I can.

"It's doing really good. A lot of people have told me they wouldn't even know I had a broken leg," she added. "I can't walk on it yet, but I can bend it."

Hoon said she has been told that it will be anywhere from one to three months before she will be able to walk on the leg again, and that it will probably be at least six months before she can play softball again -- which means she will miss not only the remainder of the Chemics' season but also her summer travel season.

"I'm thinking maybe around August or September (I can start playing again), and I'm hoping it will be sooner, but I don't want to rush it," she said, adding that she will begin physical therapy soon.

In the wake of Hoon's loss, the Chemics have moved Haley Worsley up from junior varsity to play second base. And, while Worsley has done a nice job of filling in, Starling admitted that it is difficult to replace Hoon's considerable defensive prowess, instincts, and softball IQ.

"Haley Worsley ... is an outstanding, talented kid, but everyone on the team has to (step up to) replace Emersen. It's not just Haley's job alone. ... (Worsley) is a very skilled player, and she's young, but she's doing very well," Starling said, adding that Hoon is "an on-base machine and a pest on the basepaths."

"She puts a lot of pressure on the defense, because she runs so well and has such good instincts on the basepaths," he noted. "As a coach, you miss that, and you also miss her competitiveness. ... And she's an outstanding defender. She can cover both bases on a bunt, and she turns double plays, and everyone knows she's an outstanding defender."

Starling said that Hoon was one of his team leaders prior to her injury, and he applauded her for continuing to play that role.

"She was taking more of a leadership role this year, and I give her all the credit in the world, because she has continued to do that," he said. "She's a positive influence in the dugout. It's exciting to see her continue in that role, even from the dugout."

Hoon said it has not been possible for her to travel to road games with the team, because her leg won't allow her to ride in a vehicle for significant distances. Meanwhile, she has enjoyed attending home games and lending her support -- and even the occasional words of wisdom.

"It's good to be back with the girls, and I love cheering them on. I'm learning a lot on the bench and trying to take it as a learning experience," she noted. "This has definitely made me appreciate what I'm able to do (when I'm healthy), and it's made me appreciate my love for the game. I try to keep a good attitude about it.

"... I try to remind the girls that after every at-bat, even if you go up there and get out, just to be thankful. And if you have to sit for an inning or more, just be grateful, because at least it's not your whole season," she added. "I try to let the girls learn from me, and I definitely try to help them out."

Of course, that includes Hoon's young understudy, Worsley.

"I try to help Haley out as much as I can. She's still learning, so I try to help her when I see things, try to give her some (advice about) things I know," Hoon said.

Hoon admitted that the one thing she has missed the most about playing the past few weeks is being on the field alongside Schloop, the Chemics' senior shortstop and the other half of MHS's slick-fielding middle infield.

"The hardest part was knowing that me and Gabby wouldn't have our last season to play together in the middle infield. We play together so well, and our bond had gotten so much better this year," Hoon noted. "We had time to grow that bond, and this was going to be our year, and we only got to play six games together."

"And Gabby was great when I broke my leg. She was right there with me, holding my hand, and she felt so bad. She wanted us to have this year together, too," Hoon added. "I'm glad that it's not my senior year and that I'll get to play next year, but it's still hard, because she's my middle infield partner and it's her senior year, and that makes it tough."

Although she's relegated to watching from the sidelines, Hoon said she hopes her teammates have a memorable season in her absence.

"I just want them to go far in districts and have a good record. The team has been doing good so far, and I think they're doing a great job. I think Haley (Worsley) is doing a good job stepping in, and the girls are working really good together as a team," she said.

Hoon added that she would like to see high school softball incorporate a second, orange-colored first-base bag on which the runner steps while the first-baseman keeps her foot on the inner, white-colored bag -- a system which has been in place at the travel and recreational levels for years.

"I think I'm going to try to advocate for getting that orange bag, because if we would've had that, I would still be playing right now," she said. "I know it's varsity softball, but different schools are at different levels, and some girls are still learning (how to cover the bag)."

"Having an orange bag would not be that big of a change, and that rule would be a good one to add, because it would save a lot of injuries," she added.

For his part, Starling said he hopes to see Hoon back in action in some capacity sooner rather than later.

"I hope she thinks about participating in something maybe this winter, but that's really up to her and her leg," he noted. "She's a competitive kid and a great athlete, and Midland High needs her playing sports."



Bill Vasicek flips through photos he took during the flood, Wednesday, April 7 at his home in Hope. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

RESIDENTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3A

In the days after the flood, he contacted about 20 contractors for estimates, and many were scheduling out to December of this year -- just for an estimate. He said now it's difficult and pricy to get materials due to supply chain issues attributed to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. He said Adams Electric, Brubaker Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning along with Midland Evangelical Free Church helped him.

A natural disaster amidst a global pandemic

"It was a disaster on top of a disaster," Vasicek said with the pandemic. "The people that have helped have been the greatest."

"I couldn't believe it, in 35 minutes, the whole (Wixom) lake dried up in front of my house," Vasicek said.

The lake was where he retired to on Jan. 1, 2020, and bought a new boat and had plans of fishing and living a carefree life in the cottage he owned for many years. In theory, he was going to live in the cottage in the summer and relocate for the winter.

"Then this happened," said Vasicek of the flooding. "You can't plan for this."

Vasicek said he's put all his money into his cottage, so it will be his round-year home. Living on a fixed income, he doesn't have the means to relocate for the winter as he originally hoped.

"It's the only thing I've got left," he said of his home and Jeep. His Jeep survived the flood, having been parked on higher ground.

He gave his boat to his brother who lives on Houghton Lake.

"I have no use for it now. Maybe I can go up and fish with him," Vasicek said. "I put a lot of money into a seawall, now we're all in the same boat without a boat."

He adds that it's quiet around his neighborhood since many people have left.

"I have company, I have me, myself and I," he jokes.

The Dow and Thomas Trading Post retiree doesn't show optimism of the lake's return. But questions, even if it did, with his health issues, would it be in his lifetime?

'It was like being on a camping trip for 100 days without the trip'

In the flood aftermath, Vasicek realized he was alone.

"There was no help," he said. "I was by myself. The roads were flooded."

"It was like being on a camping trip for 100 days without the trip," he said.

Meanwhile, he watched as piles of wood, furniture, boats and docks float in the low water where a water plethora once existed a short time earlier. He was sure his cars, snowmobile and two travel trailers were among the floating ruins.

Among the personal items destroyed were his World War II pilot father's letters.

Douglas Bismack owned a house on two lots on the Gladwin side of Wixom Lake. He still owns the property, but had the house bulldozed in July. Bismack said his house took on four feet of water and everything was moldy.

He said there was a force of water during the

flood. On the Thursday before, he was at his Wixom Lake house putting in dock pieces. When he left that day, he had the dock, two jet ski lifts and two boat lifts. After the flood, he had eight pieces of dock and two jet ski lifts left.

"I don't know how it took the two boat lifts, those things weigh about a thousand pounds," Bismack said. The torrent also took 20 feet of land from the side of the house and knocked-down a 20-foot seawall.

He and his family would like to rebuild, but they won't for at least another three years.

'No reason to rebuild a place up there to overlook a disaster'

"There's no reason to rebuild a place up there to overlook a disaster," Bismack said.

Bismack said he loved his spring, summer and fall getaways to his lake house and enjoyed the water activities.

"One of the best parts was swimming and not having boats coming right at you," he said. "It was one of the nicest pieces of land on the lake. We definitely enjoyed it."

He feels sadness for the people who lived in the area full time, noting it was their homes that were destroyed. Bismack said those are the ones who really suffered.


"Hopefully, it will come back," Bismack said. "But anything could happen in the next few years, possibly preventing it."

He said he knows there was talk of repairing the dams prior to the flooding, but the help didn't come in time.

"It came just a little too late," Bismack said.

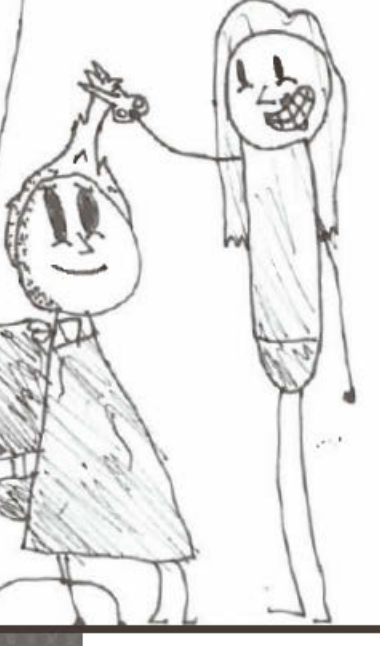
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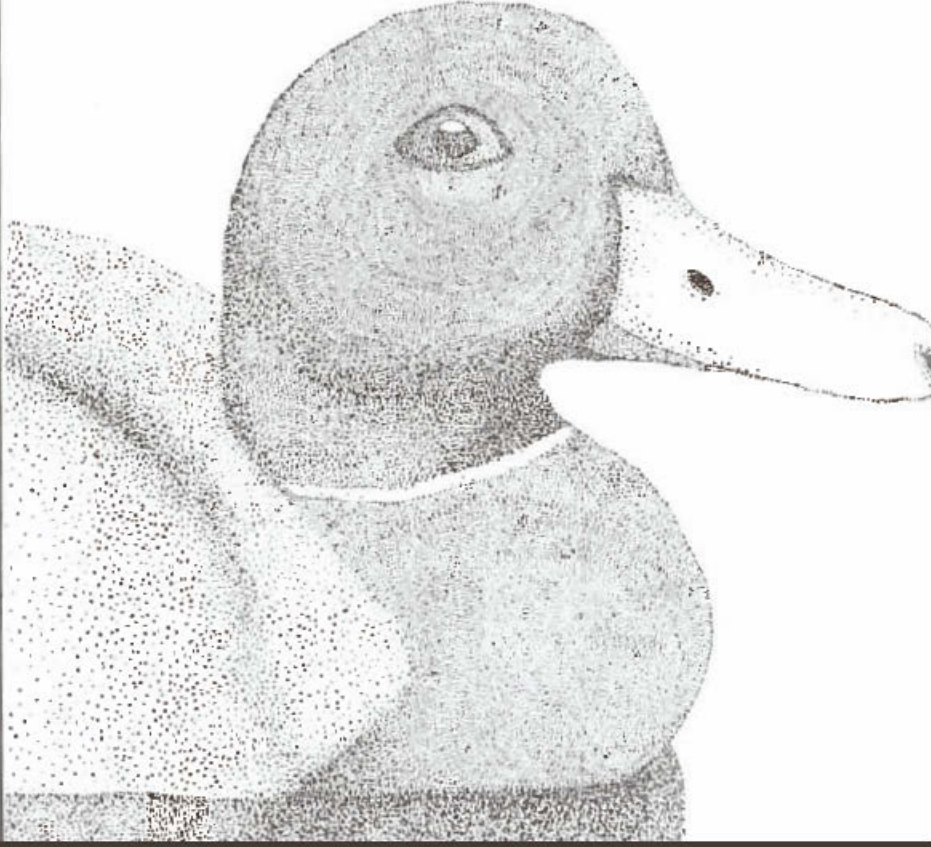
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This is Melody Hallam, Jess Beal's daughter. Jess and her family helped others clean up in the flood's wake, and then their family's well went out three days later.



Aspiring to be a drone controller in the Air Force, Jayvin Balzer is heavily involved in his community and possesses an innate desire to serve those who need help.



Chad Keyes, who suffers from the genetic eye disorder choroideremia, was staying at his parents' house on the Tittabawassee River as his forever home's construction was wrapping up. Then last May's floodwaters ruined the home that was under construction, and his father suffered a heart attack while the family was evacuated after the Edenville Dam breached.

VICTIMS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

After receiving financial assistance, Terry wasted no time and got straight to work ordering appliances, applying floor tiles and building a temporary make-shift kitchen. It wouldn't feel like home for Terry if he hadn't taken these steps to restore and even improve the pleasant lakeside feel of the house.

For Terry, this was more than a reclamation project. Because of everything he's been through, he's especially proud of what he's been able to build, and tends to focus on what he has, not what he's lost.

"I concentrate on what is going to be, not what is," he says. "You can't change what today is, but you can create a change for tomorrow. As long as I plan for a change, I can do it."

After medically retiring in 2014 and moving to his current residence in 2017, Terry looked forward to fishing on the lake's 35 miles of shoreline. For now, those plans are on hold. Nothing is left of the lake except a narrow river snaking through the grass-covered lake bed that has grown in since the flood.

As he surveys the empty lake, it's obvious that the hard times he's faced, especially in the last year, were nothing he couldn't handle.

"When I look outside, I don't see all of the grass," he says, gesturing toward the devastation. "I don't dwell on what was lost. I just look at the water we do have and in my mind's eye, it's the whole thing."

The mother: Giving help, getting help

Jess Beal works more than 60 hours a week and represents a decent portion of Sanford residents: hard-working, community-focused individuals who gave their all to their fellow neighbors after the flood left their neighborhood in shambles.

Jess and her family helped clean up in the flood's wake, but when it was time for her to receive financial assistance for her destroyed well, the government let her down.

But her landlord didn't. Jess and her children, 20-year-old Elijah and 16-year-old Melody, live in the Sanford Lake Road subdivision. Their neighborhood, which used to showcase beautiful lake scenery complete with a sandy beach, playground and community boat launch, is now completely bare, with tree stumps and car-sized craters in its place.

Jess's family watched in awe from the relative safety of their house that sits 35 feet above the water. Furniture, boats, and peoples' entire livelihoods rushed across Sanford Lake at terrifying speeds.

Jess — protective and determined — decided against evacuation, despite warnings of immense danger flashing on her phone; she had too much invested in her home. The snapping and breaking of trees reverberated as a force of water rushed toward the land.

"It was like a really awful

TV show," Jess says, "that you just couldn't take your eyes off of."

After the damage was done, the neighborhood's public beach, playground, and boat launch — originally built with community funds — were completely demolished. In other neighborhoods, these amenities could be replaced somewhat easily. In this subdivision, though, it had taken years to raise the money and it took only hours for everything to be destroyed; and it'll take years to raise the money again.

Jess's family joined others in the neighborhood in devoting more than 10 hours a day to clearing up the neighborhood destruction. If the community wasn't intensely tight-knit before, they were now.

Three days after the flood hit, Jess's family — which had just put its blood, sweat and tears into clearing the area wreckage — lost its electricity and well, leaving them no choice but to conduct everyday tasks anywhere but at their home.

"We were on generators for a whole week," Jess says. "Everyone was — that's all you could hear. We had to go to other places to shower and wash clothes, and we were pretty much fast-fooding it. It was a battle."

The owner of Jess's home, who prefers to remain anonymous, grew up in the same house and now rents it out to the family. The landlord has an emotional attachment to the area, so naturally, she did everything in her power to save the well. The landlord appealed to FEMA, her insurance and various government-funded public entities to solve the problem.

"Each time I applied," the landlord says, "I was denied because it wasn't my primary residence. Jess was denied because she didn't own the property."

After repeatedly being turned away because of a technicality, Jess's landlord had to pay close to \$5,000 to repair the well out of her own pocket. She couldn't let Jess, Melody and Elijah go without running water, and she didn't want to see her childhood home rendered uninhabitable.

"Short of forcing them to move out and condemning the place as unlivable," she asks, "what else could I do?"

The fight over the well lasted about two months, but eventually, the family regained running water and electricity. Aside from the damage done to the neighborhood's public area, Jess does not feel sorry for her situation and is thankful that she still has her home.

"I'm just grateful for what we still have," she says. "There are people who lost everything. I don't have bad feelings about what happened."

The volunteer: Calm amid the chaos

Jayvin Balzer had a feeling that something was off when he got the dispatch that evening of May 18. Jayvin is a volunteer first responder for Beaverton's fire department and has seen a lot

in his young life. But it's safe to say that he wasn't prepared for the destruction the flood and dam breaches would cause.

It's safe to say that no one was.

Beaverton born-and-raised and already a committed community servant at age 19, Jayvin hurried down to the fire department as soon as he got the call. He was surprised by the chaos in the station — radio chatter, volunteers everywhere and a genuine sense of urgency. This was the moment when he began to understand this disaster's true potential.

"When I got to the station, I'm not going to lie, it was hectic," Jayvin says, trying to find the words to describe the event. "When I put my gear on, I knew it was bigger than our town. It was county-wide and possibly a state issue."

Jayvin wasn't the only one unsure of the severity of the situation.

"I looked down the locker bay and everyone's face was basically in shock," he says. "That'll always stick in my mind. Nobody was too sure what we were walking into."

For the next day-and-a-half, Jayvin and his crewmates tirelessly worked in the Wixom and Edenville areas. They primarily gave evacuation warnings and helped elderly and disabled residents grab necessities and seek shelter elsewhere. Those individuals were the first responders' top priority as the flood became increasingly dire.

"The way the water level was rising was unreal," Jayvin says. "We went to this older couple's house to help get them out, and when we arrived, the water was high, but nothing too dramatic. Five, 10 minutes later, when we were leaving, their porch was completely submerged."

"I quickly realized the water was rising a lot faster than I anticipated," Jayvin adds.

After helping a great number of people relocate for the evening, Jayvin made a pillow out of his coat, slept for a few hours and woke up to do it all again the next day. The station had to have people on standby, so there were personnel on site for more than a day. Though Jayvin did not live in an area affected by the flooding, the catastrophes he witnessed weighed on him regardless.

If this experience taught Jayvin anything, it's that people's lives are fragile; they can change in an instant.

"When it happened, it really took a toll on me and I was quite scared for a few people," he says. "I was in shock. It made me feel heartbroken for everyone involved."

Aspiring to be a drone controller in the Air Force, Jayvin is heavily involved in his community and possesses an innate desire to serve those who need help. As he considers the prospect of tackling the same opportunity to help if the flood came again today — and the despair and heartbreak that would come with it — he doesn't

hesitate, not for a minute.

"Absolutely," he says. "I'd absolutely do it again."

The homeowner: Mounting challenges

After three-and-a-half years of staying in the same apartment, Chad Keyes was finally about to move into his own home. Chad is almost completely blind, and the project being nearly completed was something he could count on and anticipate.

Until the house was completely washed away by the flood.

Chad, who suffers from the hereditary eye disease choroideremia, was staying at his parents' house on the Tittabawassee River as his forever home's construction was wrapping up.

As the rainfall became heavier and the flood waters rose, Chad obsessively checked the river to see when the flood would crest. Once that happened, he reasoned, things could be somewhat normal again.

Chad received an alert that the Edenville Dam had breached. "Pack a bag!" Chad yelled to his parents from across the house. "We've got to leave!" Immediately after warning his parents, Chad heard his father call out for him, saying that he was in deep trouble.

His father was having a heart attack.

Chad rushed over to his father and called 9-1-1.

"I told him I was right there with him and that it was OK," Chad says. "It's weird what your mind does to you in those moments."

Chad waited with his father for EMS to arrive, but because those crews were stretched so thin already, only one worker was available. Chad's brother-in-law also showed up and ushered Chad, his parents, two poodles and two cats out of the house and to safety via rowboat. Even though help came, by no means did it mean that everything was all right. Chad was now facing crises on multiple fronts.

"With all that was happening with my house, my parents' house and my dad's health, it was hard to keep myself together," he says. "I was trying to get a few things in a bag because I knew the Sanford Dam wasn't going to hold up, and there's my dad getting loaded into an ambulance at the end of the driveway. Definitely something I'm never going to forget."

For the next couple days, Chad's father received intensive care as Chad stayed at his sister's house. Chad's 48th birthday fell on May 20. But Chad had no time to be worried about himself; he was mostly concerned about his parents.

"If I had time to think about anything," Chad says, "I was feeling bad for my parents because they're older, and what they were going to suffer because of it. I was devastated for them."

In the days after the flood's destruction, Chad and his brother-in-law got to an area where they could look across the river



Kadence Nickel and her family had to kayak to dry land from their Wixom Lake property.

at Chad's parents' house. His new house was out of sight and covered by dense woods. The only thing out of the ordinary was that the lawn chairs at his parents' house were gone. Chad still held out hope for both his parents' house and his soon-to-be home.

Sadly, he would never see its completion. A few days later, he was finally able to get to his house and discovered that it was completely swept off the foundation and, presumably, carried down the river. This destroyed his hopes of having his own place, not to mention that this was supposed to be his forever home.

Thankfully, that wasn't the end of his story.

Today, Chad has moved back to the apartment he lived in before all of the chaos, which at least brought a sense of familiarity. The silver lining of the whole saga is that Chad has a new house being built; he'll move in next fall. He's eager to have his own space and be a homeowner, and he's somehow found a way to see the bright spots of this particularly dark moment in local history.

"It would be easy to feel discouraged, and sometimes I do," he says, "especially with my life circumstances of losing more vision and knowing eventually I will be completely blind. It has made staying positive difficult, but I'm still able to do it."

"It's just a little more challenging."

The teenager: A new perspective

First came the blaring sirens. Then came the flashing lights. Never anticipating how severe the damage would become, Kadence Nickel and her family chose to ignore evacuation warnings, stay on their Wixom Lake property and prepare for only a few inches of flooding.

That was all they expected. But this was only the beginning.

A few hours later, at nearly 2 a.m., Kadence awoke to two feet of water in the garage and water seeping through the air vents. Her family hatched a new plan — to clear out by sunrise.

Gathering only important possessions, Kadence's family prepared to head for a hotel where Kadence's mother was staying. (Kadence's mother, a Sanford Lake resident, had evacuated the night before). A problem, though, was how the family would get to the car; their well-kept front lawn was

now four feet deep with murky, dark water.

"We had no choice but to kayak over our yard," says Kadence, now a 16-year-old Beaverton High School junior. "My dad could walk, but it was up to his waist and the water was dark brown, so you couldn't see to the bottom."

Upon arriving at the hotel, the Nickel family's stress doubled as each of her parents' houses was at risk of severe flood damage. At her mother's house, Kadence's bedroom and three cats were in the basement. Neither her personal belongings nor her pets had been moved up to the first story of the house, and as a girl with a special attachment to her cats, this worried her deeply. With nothing to do about the situation, Kadence's helplessness was heightened.

"I had nowhere to go," she says.

After hours of waiting for some sign of hope, Kadence got the news that her father's house was unlivable and her mother's basement was flooded.

"When both houses were damaged, it was hard to figure out where to stay," Kadence says. "I was so shaken up that it didn't hit me that we were experiencing a historic flood that would impact both of my houses."

Aside from the flooding in the basement, her mother's house was intact. And despite the relative luck that one house was still habitable, Kadence was still forced to move out of her father's house — and her childhood home.

"It's very sad because I grew up in that house," she says. "I couldn't wrap my mind around the amount of damage that could happen in such a short time."

Many individuals whose lives have been completely altered by the flood have had to learn tough life lessons in the most severe ways; Kadence is no exception.

Today, she has moved into a new house that she adores, and although the loss of her father's house saddens her, she has come to view life after the flood as a fresh start. She believes that she's come out a significantly stronger person.

"I know the flood hurt a lot of people, but I've grown as a person," Kadence says. "I'm more grateful for what I have now. You never know when what you have will be taken from you and you'll have to start fresh."

"I have a new perspective on things."



Sixth-grader Hayden Rozewski is St. John's 2020-2021 Chief Science Officer. Together with his parents, Chuck and Stephanie Rozewski, they developed and produced five at-home STEM projects. (Photos Provided)

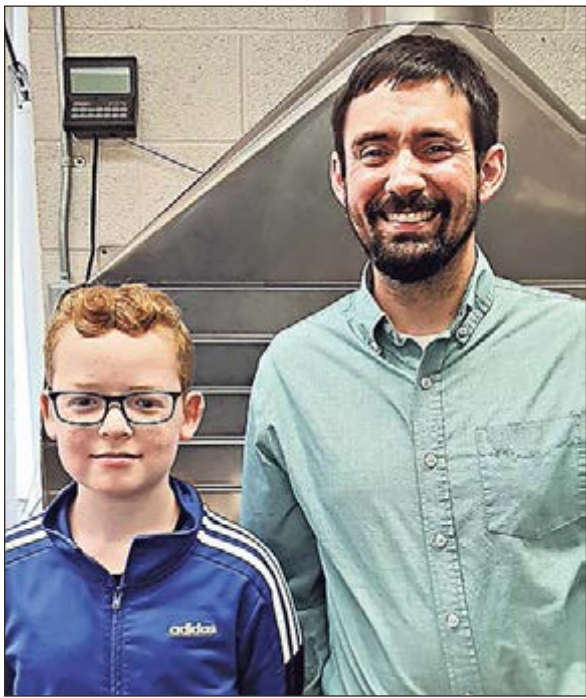
Sixth-grader Hayden Rozewski is St. John's 2020-2021 Chief Science Officer. Together with his parents, Chuck and Stephanie Rozewski, they developed and produced five at-home STEM projects. (Photos Provided)

St. John's Lutheran student organizes STEM projects

St. John's Lutheran School has participated in Saginaw Valley State University's Chief Science Officer Program for many years. One or two students in grades six through eighth are chosen each year to represent St. John's at a consortium of middle and high school students from schools in the Great Lakes Bay Region.

They meet a few times a year with business leaders to enrich middle and high school STEM culture and career awareness. They also explore new ways to bring science-technology-engineering-math (STEM) education back to the students at their schools.

In years past, the St. John's CSO representatives have aided the science teachers in hosting an after-school stemmie program. They helped design hands-on activities to engage the students in a specific principal of science. However, this year most extra-curricular activities where students had to mingle were halted due to COVID restrictions.



Pictured is St. John's Chief Science Officer Hayden Rozewski and his teacher Michael Hiddings. (Photo Provided)

But one ambitious sixth grader thought the stemmie program was too important to miss, and also very fun. Sixth-grader Hayden Rozewski is St. John's 2020-2021 Chief Science Officer. Together with his parents, Chuck and Stephanie Rozewski, they developed and produced five at-home STEM projects. Students in grades one through sixth who

elected to participate in this optional home learning activity were given a bag of supplies each Monday for five weeks. It included the parts necessary to complete the project at home, as well as an instruction sheet.

Of course, sometimes it is easier to learn by watching, so Hayden went one step further and recorded a video each week with a demonstration and

explanation. These were posted each week on the school website so parents and students could watch them together while completing their cool science project at home. The five projects included making a lava lamp; building a bridge; building a crane; making an egg-drop container; and building a motorized car. All of the kits were provided to students at no cost to them. In addition to the fun from the hands-on activity, the students learned an important science concept associated with each project. You can read more about the STEM projects and view the instructional videos on their website at <https://sjlmidland.org/k-8-education/stem-program>.

St. John's Lutheran School offers classes for students in Kindergarten through grade 8, as well as Preschool for children ages 3, 4, and a Young 5s program. For more information, visit their website or contact the school office at 989-835-7041 to arrange a personal tour of the school.

LAKES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4A

confident implementing this plan will restore the life we knew before the May 2020 disaster and make the lake ecosystems even better. If we all work together, we will have safe and stable dams, stronger communities and a more sustainable future for our economy and our environment for everyone and for all lakes.

On behalf of the Four Lake Task Force and the Lake Associations for each of the four

lakes, I want to thank the thousands of people who are supporting the recovery and restoration of our lakes. The lakes will return to their natural beauty, and while the journey has just begun the future is promising. Please read our Lake Restoration Plan, but more importantly, please join us in our mission, our obligation to our future, to restore these lakes and heal our communities.

Dave Kepler, President, and Lake Property Owner, Four Lakes Task Force

GARDEN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4A

weird is seen among beds of shrubbery, annuals and perennials, trees and even the vegetable garden. Indeed, especially a homemade scarecrow.

Guidelines are few. Choose:

1. Something that pleases or delights you, regardless of how tacky or stupid it may seem to others. After all, it is your garden and for your enjoyment. Yours is not Dow Gardens.

2. Something three-dimensional rather than flat. Flat stuff visually fades from sight.

3. Something of a size appropriate to its placement; way too big or way too small will eventually annoy you.

So, where do you find this stuff? Most of mine, I've found at art shows, craft festivals and garden centers. I have found nothing at big box stores as that stuff seems cheaply made and for sure mass-produced and not overly original. Just saying. Online? I am sure, but you, the gardener, need to see, feel, smell, touch and walk about it to be sure it's right for you. Local may be best.

Don't use the same

object forever as you, your mood, your garden are ever-changing. Bring it inside for winter so it is protected and you and it – especially your eyeball – get a rest and it is still fresh to you next year.

Over the years, I've collected maybe 12 such objects. Some of my favorites are rusted and poorly painted small caricatures of pigs, chickens and other farm animals, all with goofy faces, a funny monk in monk garb with arms outstretched, multi-piece whirligigs (wind driven) and so on.

Probably my favorite is meant to be a "gotcha": A concrete mean-looking gargoyle about 15 inches long and a wingspan of maybe ten inches and with a scowling face. Year-around, it hangs about eight feet high tucked amidst the branches of a young pin oak tree in my backyard, close to the back door. Visitors seldom notice it, but when they do – well, they do. It is perfect (for me).

Edward (Ed) Hutchison, of Midland, is authoring a weekly spring gardening column for the Midland Daily News. He can be reached at edhutchison@mac.com.

ART

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4A

and public art celebrates those opportunities.

Third, public art asks us to come together. Midland County's vision – "Together. Forward. Bold. An exceptional place where everyone thrives." describes the very nature of public art. It is a collaborative effort; the community gets to share in the artist's vision and creative process and the artist gets to experience the power of community support. And the result is a bold, visual statement about how we can come together to create something wonderful.

Fourth, public art is an economic plus. Back to the 2017 article, it should be no surprise that cities with an active and dynamic cultural scene are more attractive to both individuals and to new businesses. Public art is key to creating this atmosphere. It transforms our regular spaces into unique ones – take for instance the mural on The Midland Emergency Foodbank Building – People Helping People. It is not only beautiful, but it also tells the viewer so much about who we are as a community – vibrant, active, caring. Art transforms everyday spaces into joyful experiences.

Finally, public art has the potential to change the way a community operates because public art places a new kind of value on the skill set of the artist. When artists are included in the mix with planners, engineers, and community leaders and officials, they

bring their own type of creativity to the table. The artist's interpretation of the project at hand – the idea, the social focus, the aesthetic – all of these insights can lead to a more imaginative and publicly-appreciated result. If there is one area where Midland could improve, it would be in inviting more artists to the table as we plan for the future.

The good news is, public art is happening in Midland, and it is definitely making a difference and building a sense of place. The weekend of June 5-6, you have the chance to support local art and artists at a number of Midland events: the Summer Art Fair hosted by the Midland Center for the Arts, the Public Arts Midland Art Seen Festival, Mural Blast, and the Creative 360 Art Speaks Spoken Word Festival and community mural project. Check out the Public Arts Midland Facebook page for more information.

And the next time you pass by one of Midland's nearly 50 public arts installations, or one of the many smaller, business-created artistic installations, stop. Engage. Think about how that piece changes your experience with your environment. Get involved. After all, public art is not public art without you.

Laura Vosejka is the executive director of Creative 360, a not-for-profit community arts and wellness organization in Midland. She can be reached at director@creative360.org.

Midland's Beautification Advisory Committee seeks online nominations for awards

Midland Daily News

Midland's Beautification Advisory Committee asks residents to nominate a friend, neighbor, or even someone they don't know for making Midland more beautiful.

The committee is accepting nominations for the annual Appreciation of Beautification Awards for Landscaping Accomplishments and Structural/Site Improvements made to residential and non-residential (business) property.

A third category, the Bette R. Tollar Civic Commitment Award, recognizes major beautification accomplishments that benefit the community as a whole.

Only properties within the City of Midland are eligible for awards. A digital nomination form can be found at www.cityofmidlandmi.gov/beautyawards. Nomination deadline is Aug. 1.

At this time, the plan is for recipients of this year's awards to be recognized and honored at a ceremony in November.

For more information, visit the Municipal Service Center, 4811 N. Saginaw Road, or contact Midland Parks and Recreation at 989-837-6930 or at recreation@midland-mi.org.

All City of Midland offices, non-emergency services closed on Memorial Day

No recycling collection the week of May 31

Midland Daily News

All City of Midland offices and non-emergency services will be closed on Monday, May 31 in observance of the Memorial Day holiday.

Residents with Monday and Tuesday refuse collection should place items at the curb on Tuesday, June 1. Items should be placed at the curb by 7:30 a.m. to ensure collection.

There is no recycling collection for the week of May 31. The Sanitary Landfill

will be closed on Memorial Day, but will have regular Saturday hours from 8:30 a.m. to noon on Saturday, May 29.

Dial-A-Ride will be closed on Memorial Day, but will observe its normal operating hours on Saturday, May 29 and Sunday, May 30.

Grace A. Dow Memorial Library will not offer curbside pick-up or phone service hours on Monday, May 31. Curbside pick-up will resume on Tuesday, June 1 at 11 a.m.

Jack Barstow Municipal Airport will be unattended on Memorial Day.

ONE YEAR LATER

Saturday, May 15, 2021

A section
commemorating Midland
County's recovery from
the 2020 Mid-Michigan
Dam Failures.

Midland
DAILY NEWS
ourmidland.com





Employees of Francis Builders work to renovate the home of Rebecca Johnson and her daughter, Autumn Pontseele, Friday, Sept. 25, 2020 in downtown Sanford. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

Long Term Disaster Recovery Group leads recovery efforts

How the group helps homeowners rebuild

ANDREW MULLIN
AMullin@hearstnp.com

Lindsay Cochran already experienced damage to her home due to flooding four years ago. The second time was much worse.

In 2017, flooding pushed three feet of water into her home, but she decided to stay in the house.

In 2020, water was spraying from her basement shower and toilet like a geyser, resulting in seven feet of water in her basement.

"I stayed, I did not leave," Cochran said. "That was not the right choice."

Luckily, the Long-Term Disaster Recovery Group is serving homeowners like Cochran.

The long-term recovery stage started after then President Donald Trump declared the Mid-Michigan area flood a federal disaster, allowing FEMA to come in, assess the damage, and get funds to homeowners.

Recovery group chairperson Holly Miller said the group aims to help guide homeowners through a recovery process.

The group is comprised of local nonprofits, businesses, government agencies, groups from the faith-based community, civic groups, public schools, and universities, she said. Many key components are involved with long-term recovery, which she said include:

Case management and assessment: Guiding individuals through the rebuilding process and connect-

ing them with financial and human resources along the way.

Financial support: Raises and allocates funds for flood relief. Funds have mainly been raised from United Way of Midland and the Midland Area Community Foundation.

Volunteer coordination: Direct national and local volunteer groups.

Housing: Making people safe with short term housing and providing rent assistance.

Rebuild and construction: Rebuilding homes while following

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national and local guidelines and permitting.

Communication and public relations: Reaching out and letting people know what resources are available to them.

“The establishment of the long-term disaster recovery group is truly collaboration at its best,” Miller said. “This is bringing folks together, broad representation from across the community, playing to strengths.”

Individual homeowners work with disaster case managers through this process, navigating them through the resources available, Miller said. The managers can advocate for the client on behalf of FEMA, guide clients through the Small Business Alliance loans process, and connect them to other local resources.

Last year, nearly 4,000 homes reported damaged in the flood, Miller said. Cochran was one of those affected, losing her heater, furnace, washer, dryer, her bedroom, and the basement walls, floor and ceiling. She was not able to stay in her for about two weeks.

“I had to watch everything be hauled to the curb,” Cochran said. “All the things I worked hard for. Things that I had saved, heirlooms (from when) my son was a baby, and (I) watched that all disappear.”

However, despite the amount of

damage to her home, FEMA only gave her \$2,000, which she used for a new washer, dryer and expenses while living away from home. She said the amount was very disheartening.

However, someone from the recovery group reached out to Cochran and said the group wanted to assess her damages and help repair her home. Through the group, she was able to get windows replaced, and walls and doors adjusted.

They also got her in touch with a local church that provided a no-interest loan so she could start trying to rebuild the basement. Some young church men donated their Nerf gun collection to her son. Recently, the last home project was finished when her new flooring was installed.

“I don’t know what I would have done without them,” Cochran said. “They have just been a godsend, not only for my financial state, but for my mental health.”

Looking forward though, the group still has a lot more people to serve. Miller said it might take another 18 or 24 months to serve the homeowners they need to.

Cochran said despite the previous floods, she loves her neighborhood and community and does not want to leave.

“It is hard to rebuild, but it is harder to leave after you’ve put so much heart, soul, blood and sweat into rebuilding your life in your home,” Cochran said. “This is home.”



Debris and damaged items are set out to the curb on Island Drive Monday, June 22, 2020 in Tobacco Township. (Katy Kildee/kkilddee@mdn.net)



Rebecca Johnson poses for a portrait inside her home in downtown Sanford Thursday, Sept. 24, 2020. (Katy Kildee/kkilddee@mdn.net)

A LEADER IN PHOTOGRAPHY
MIDLAND DAILY NEWS' PHOTOGRAPHER KATY KILDEE
HAS EARNED NUMEROUS PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS
THIS YEAR FROM THE MICHIGAN PRESS
ASSOCIATION, INCLUDING:

- FIRST PLACE AND HONORABLE MENTION IN FEATURE PHOTOGRAPHY
- NO. 1 AND 2 IN NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY

- NO. 1 AND 2 IN PHOTO STORY
- NO. 1 AND 2 IN SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY



Midland
DAILY NEWS

Neighbors helping neighbors



Natasha Maxwell, of Albright Shores, says Cancer Services of Midland, Z's Property Maintenance, Great Lakes Bay Veterans Coalition, Midland Noon Exchange, Roots Property Inspection, and multiple volunteers helped her family move, covered utility expenses, provided gift cards, dropped off meals, and set up Easter baskets and an egg hunt for her family.

Flood victims share stories of outpouring of help

KATE HESSLING

khessling@hearstnp.com

The Midland Daily News recently partnered with United Way of Midland County to showcase how neighbors helped neighbors following last May's dam failures.

A common theme among most residents was the inability to put into words how thankful they are to all who helped them recover from the devastating floods.

Here's a look at some of their stories:

Jump on the quads, it's time to help

Jeanette Snyder, of Sanford, said her kids were learning from home last May because of COVID-19 restrictions.

"We canceled our family spring

break vacation like most people," she said. "With that vacation money, on a whim, we bought two quads."

Fast forward to the flood. Snyder, a Midland County commissioner who represents most of Sanford, sprang into action at the emergency command center and helped with communications with Sanford Village President Dolores Porte.

"When I was gone helping and my husband was at work, my children (Maddie, 17, and Lucian, 15) got on those quads and began helping neighbors on Island Drive," Snyder said. "What a blessing! They roped in some of their friends to help: Nate, Ashley and Amanda Wiggins."

At the end of Island Drive, which is on the east side of Sanford Lake, is the association property and Beard's Blueberry Farm, which acted like a net: catching kayaks, sheds, quads, boats, decks, hot tubs, etc.

"Those kids pulled out countless items and lined them on the dead-end court for neighbors to come and



Jim and Marge Sperling, of Edenville, lost everything when the dams failed.

take their belongings," Snyder said. "The kids also assisted neighbors personally with many needs. At a time during COVID, when the kids felt they had no purpose and were feeling pretty defeated, they found their calling to help. The flood is and was devastating, but for me, I will always remember this as a silver lining. Great job kids!"

Feeling blessed because of friends

After the flood waters from the dam failures receded, Phillip Blaisdell, of Midland, was able to return to home.

"When we walked up, we noticed that our basement windows had been blown out and the basement was full of water. The walls of our basement had also been blown out and the home was only supported by the

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corners of the foundation,” Blaisdell stated. “A very surreal site to see.”

Blaisdell called his friend, Keith Thurlow, to swing by and look at the damage.

“He showed up within 20 minutes. He immediately called a longtime acquaintance who repairs foundations to come and look at the situation,” Blaisdell said. “We determined that we needed to shore up the house as soon as possible as there was pressure building up on the corners and it needed to be relieved.

“I went to the store to purchase the long list of materials we would need. Keith got his backhoe to remove the dirt against the remaining walls. We spent two full days wading around in three feet of mud and water trying to get enough support under the house until work could get started on recovery.”

Several friends came by to help the Blaisdells remove all the drywall and insulation, including Ken Staten and Bruce Woodcraft.

“We had many friends and family show up to help us remove the furniture and things that were damaged to the curb as well as box up the things that were not damaged so we could get them into storage,” Blaisdell said.

Then, the Blaisdells needed a place to live for roughly three to four months while they would be out of the home as it was being repaired.

“We were about ready to sign a year-long lease for \$1,300 a month because there was nothing else available, when a good friend, Jim Pollack, called and said he had a furnished cottage/home in Gladwin that we could stay at while our home was being repaired. He offered this to us for free,” Blaisdell said.

“We had a devastating event happen to us, which in the beginning was way more than I could handle,” he continued. ... “However, I never realized the friendships and the goodness of people in the community was there for me when I needed it most. So much outpouring of emotional, physical and financial support from people we knew and people we didn’t. We realized how blessed we are and it certainly changed my life for the better.”

Church was this family’s



After the flood waters from the dam failures receded, Phillip Blaisdell, of Midland, was able to return to home. “When we walked up, we noticed that our basement windows had been blown out and the basement was full of water,” Blaisdell said. “The walls of our basement had also been blown out and the home was only supported by the corners of the foundation. A very surreal site to see.”



Mary Sanik, of Sanford, says she doesn’t think there is anything she can say that is thank-you enough for all of the help and support she received from friends, neighbors, family, community and strangers.

saving grace

Sue Foster, of Midland, says friends from the Free Methodist Church were her saving grace.

“The real guardian angels for us were Gary and JoAnn Avery,” Foster said. “She took in my husband, me and our two dogs at 11:30 the night of the flood. She gave up her bed and slept on the couch for 10 days and then continued to watch our dogs all day every day for weeks until it was safe for them to come home.”

Other people from the church helped remove sopping wet insulation from Foster’s crawl space, and people from a sister church helped ripped out Foster’s 68-year-old hardwood floors.

“One of our church members brought a huge dump truck and a dozen others to help fill it,” Foster said. “We went three to four weeks without sitting down or enjoying a cooked meal until our next-door neighbor Lacey (also flooded) invited us over for sloppy joes. That was the best food I ever ate! I don’t know how we would have made it without all the help!”

Ron Browne, of Midland, was also helped by a local church.

“Midland Evangelical Free Church gave us cleaning supplies and offered labor. They carried the old water heater out of the basement,” Browne said. “Thank you! We knew we weren’t alone.”

Kay Bredeweg, of Midland, said the action following the flooding from the dam failures was a beautiful example of God’s love and care for the community through the hands of so many folks.

“The details of dealing with it all was lightened for us through so many practical ways,” Bredeweg said. “Several of our church family brought meals and helped haul stuff out; a group of churches stopped by bringing meals every week; another church stopped by to offer whatever help was needed; Little Caesar’s delivered pizza and the trimmings with it; a neighbor boy and girl brought us cold drinks as we sorted things on a hot day; those same children brought us cookies; another friend stopped by with cookies; friends helped haul new drywall to the basement,” Bredeweg said.

“Our own adult children, both



Linda and Wayne Allen, of Sanford, reported that so many people the couple didn't know just began showing up to help them muck out mud and debris, strip down drywall, pull up flooring, and haul things away.

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from out of town, spent many hours and days helping. What a blessing to live in such a caring community. Many helping hands, prayers and calls lifted our spirits and provided encouragement and support — thank you! I realize that when you are in great need or situations like this, there is help out there, (and) I graciously accept their gift with appreciation. Even though we might not know our neighbors and others in our community, we still have a common bond and a desire to reach out when there is a need. I am grateful to live in Midland.”

Overwhelmed by support

Jim and Marge Sperling, of Edenville, lost everything they had in the flood. But they were inspired by all the organizations and people who stepped up to help them.

“We stayed in a trailer, and Christie MacDonald brought us hot meals throughout the summer,” the couple reports. “Angela Cole brought us quilts and other assistance. Great Lakes Bay Veterans Coalition got us a shed (they built it). Churches

in Midland provided drywall and installed it. Veterans Administration helped out with purchasing kitchen appliances, and so many others in this wonderful community helped.

“Thank you to all of the great people who helped so many in our community. God bless you! It gave us the strength not to give up and have hope!”

Linda and Wayne Allen, of Sanford, report that it's impossible to list all the people who helped.

“So many people we didn't know just showed up and started working in the mud and debris, stripping down drywall, pulling up flooring, hauling away trailer after trailer of ruined possessions,” according to the Allens. “People were bringing food and water, always asking what they could do to help. It was overwhelming to say the least and caused a couple of unexpected meltdowns.

“I won't even try to list people and all the contributions, but we hope they realize how much we appreciated everything. Thank you. Thank you. You never know when you may be the one who needs help.”

Ann Raphael, of Sanford, also lost everything.



Jeanette Snyder, of Sanford, joined her family members to help others recover from the flooding.

“Volunteers came to remove and haul away all my household goods,” she said. “People came around to drop off lunches and water. I was able to pick up cleaning supplies at Sanford school and get Christmas decorations at a church. Thank you for all of your efforts, especially during a pandemic. It felt good to see people come together during two emergencies.”

Natasha Maxwell, of Albright Shores, said Cancer Services of Midland, Z's Property Maintenance, Great Lakes Bay Veterans Coalition, Midland Noon Exchange, Roots Property Inspection, and multiple volunteers helped her family move, covered utility expenses, provided gift cards, dropped off meals, and set up Easter baskets and an egg hunt for her family.

“Taking it one step further, GLBVC helped me obtain a replacement laptop so that I could get back to work with my real estate photography business and teaching certification classes,” Maxwell said. “While our home was not flooded, it required water damage repairs while my husband has been battling stage 3C Choriocarcinoma. We are now in a safe home because of the efforts of these organizations and volunteers.

“You helped provide hope when I had lost it, feeling completely swallowed up by our circumstances. Your efforts and support will always be remembered with deep gratitude. Thank you for all you have done for our family.”

Maxwell's husband developed pneumonia while fighting cancer, and they soon found mold damage under all of their flooring.

“We had to move into a hotel during repairs and stay with family,” Maxwell said. “The support we received helped our home get into a safe condition for living. Our family is now back home and enjoying our own space again.

“Hard times fall on each of us at different times. Stepping in to help others when they're going through difficult times helps people keep moving forward. The help we give to others is often reciprocated in a cycle of paying it forward.”

Stranger's offer moves flood victim

After endless days in 90 degrees of cleaning mud out of her Sanford home, Darlene McDade stood in her muddy yard in yet another 90-degree day with buckets and started to wash

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dishes that she had salvaged from the flood.

“With sweat pouring down my face as I wondered how much more I can take, a lady walked up to me and says, ‘What can I do to help?’ I was puzzled as to where she came from and what I could delegate to her helping hand. I stood there not knowing what to say and she said, ‘I live up on the hill, and I’d be happy to take all your bins of muddy dishes to my house and wash them all.’”

Her name was Carla Huntoon, and she could not have showed up at a better time.

“We cried together and she loaded up my bins, not once but twice, and came back with every item shining clean,” McDade said. “My husband and I couldn’t have been more blessed. She went above and beyond to help us. Along with so many others, Carla showed up just when I thought I just wanted to give up! Thank you,

Carla Huntoon, from the bottom of my heart.”

Meridian teacher helps out big

A few days after the flood, Rebecca Malkin, of Sanford, went to the Sanford Pharmacy where a table was set up where folks could ask for help.

“We said we needed help with water in our basement and getting our belongings up out of the water. A group came,” she said.

This group included Adam Mager, a teacher at Meridian, and some of the players from the Meridian football team.

“Adam connected with us and continued to help us for weeks,” Malkin said. “For about a month, he came to our house twice a day and pumped water out of our basement. He also put us in touch with a company who could install a sump pump. We would have been in a bad way without his help. He continues to check up on us to this day. We were so lucky to have met him and to have him in our lives.

“As we are elderly, we were phys-

ically unable to do the heavy lifting involved with cleaning up the basement and pumping the water. We would have had to hire someone to do all the work he and his friends did for us. Adam, you were a godsend. You helped us get through a very difficult time. We can’t thank you enough.”

You never know when you might need help

Shantele Elmy, of Midland, said one neighbor gave her plywood for her floors and transported items to the dump.

“The neighbor on the other side of us helped pack items into a trailer when we were moving stuff out of the house,” she added. “Thank you so much, Tom Szymanski and Lisa Grabmeyer, for all of your help and support. It saved us money. It also gave me a better feeling about the Midland community. Neighbors are the closest persons to reach you in a crisis because they are right there. It’s important to help out your fellow man, especially those who live right near you. You never know when you

might need help.”

Like others, Mary Sanik, of Sanford, doesn’t know how to adequately thank everyone for all of the help and support she received from friends, neighbors, family, community and strangers.

“This was honestly the most terrible thing we’ve had to deal with in our lives, and at the same time, the most amazing because of the support, caring, generosity, and kindness we received. The strength of our family and all of you have gotten us where we are today ...” Sanik said.

“This catastrophe has showed us the kindness in our neighbors, the generosity of our friends and family, a sense of community, and faith in the world of strangers. It makes me now want to help others and pay it forward. We’re all in this together, and everyone has a little something different to offer each problem or situation. It’s good to know you’ve helped your neighbor, and that maybe you’ve got a friend that will help you, too.”

Zero deaths: How first responders helped preserve life during 2020 flooding

Emergency response plan, training and constant vigilance were invaluable

VICTORIA RITTER
vritter@mdn.net

The Mid-Michigan dam failures last May caused millions of dollars’ worth in damages to businesses and homes and displaced hundreds of families. The one bright side is the devastation did not include the loss of human life, chiefly due to the preparation and action taken by area first responders and the Midland County Office of Emergency Management.

Preparing for the worst, hoping for the best

Preparedness stretched months before the dam break via a dam failure response plan presented by Midland County Emergency Management Coordinator Jenifer Boyer. Boyer met with local fire chiefs and other public safety agencies in 2019

to review a draft the plan along with inundation maps and computer models. The plan primarily identified the impacts of a flood on different aspects of the community, from roads to homes and businesses.

“Each fire department worked locally to put together a list of those impact areas and put a plan together on how to evacuate those areas,” Boyer said.

At the time, Midland Township Fire Chief Tim Swanson hoped the plan would never need to be used and didn’t anticipate that he, along with his fellow fire chiefs, would refer to it in just a few months’ time.

“We were ahead of the game as to what addresses would be affected by a dam failure and where the water would go,” Swanson said. “I firmly believe the preplanning of each fire department contributed to the no loss of life.”

In addition to the response plan, Midland Fire Department Chief Chris Coughlin explained the department undergoes training from the National Fire Academy in Maryland. This training covers command con-



Local officials gathered at the emergency operations center (EOC) prior and during the dam failures and flooding in May 2020 to coordinate response and recovery efforts. (Photo provided/Chris Coughlin)

trols for major and minor incidents, from field operations to communications.

“We’ve done the best that we can so people are well-trained,” Coughlin said.

The gathering storm

As the area experienced heavy rainfall during the weekend of May 16-17, 2020, questions were raised about the possibility of flooding. The fire chiefs and Central Dispatch

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met with Boyer to discuss the changing conditions and what to expect. Meanwhile, City of Midland personnel kept a careful eye on the National Weather Service's flood watch and monitored the heavy rainfall as it continued into Sunday.

Leading up to the weekend, Coughlin initially expected the city would experience some flooding and select areas would need to be evacuated, all according to the city and county's flood response plan. The situation seemed to be taking a normal course until the emergency operations center started to receive inconsistent information from the watershed.

"We were beginning to get reports from the Gladwin city manager that things weren't looking good," Coughlin said.

"We were looking at having a pretty significant flood event. After 5 p.m. Monday was when things started changing rapidly and information came in. The information was getting worse," Boyer said.

By Monday night, the National Weather Service (NWS) expected the Tittabawassee River to crest at 32.5 feet; Coughlin explained there are action points in place for up to 33.9 feet while 35 feet is considered a 100-year event and 38 feet is considered a 500-year event. The EOC referred to the dam failure response plan's inundation maps but were still not certain what roads would become flooded or which areas would be inaccessible.

Using the dam failure response plan as a reference, Boyer knew the community would be cut in half by any major flood, with some areas being able to utilize only a few roads. A virtual EOC meeting was held late on Monday night to discuss the situation and analyze the incoming data from Gladwin County and Boyce Hydro. The issue became clear to the EOC that area dams were in danger of being overtopped by the rising waters. Boyer suggested evacuating communities closest to the dams, as she was concerned that something might happen in the middle of the night.

"Knowing that things could get better by morning...I'd rather dis-

rupt lives and have nothing happen," Boyer said.

Coughlin suggested the phrase "imminent dam failure" be used in a message to residents so that the situation would be taken seriously and was supported by those present at the meeting. Around 12:22 a.m. Tuesday, May 19, the warning was issued to residents around Wixom and Sanford lakes as well as Midland.

Notifications and evacuations

Coughlin conducted a general callback of his department on Tuesday; nearly all of the three shifts, comprised of 43 firefighters, came in. While a typical shift is 24 hours, most of the Midland firefighters didn't return home for two to three days and slept on cots and chairs at Fire Station 1. Meanwhile, their families were notified to remove themselves from the path of the flood.

"We were careful early on when we knew this was a major event that they had to take care of their families and get them to a safe place," Coughlin said.

Coughlin and Assistant Chief Josh Mosher drove to Sanford and Wixom dams to assess conditions. Although most people had evacuated by that time, the waters were about to overtop the earthen works at both sites. Shortly after a meeting with the sheriff, fire chiefs, Boyce Hydro and other representatives to discuss how to address this issue, Midland County 911 broadcast an alert that the Edenville Dam had been breached, followed by a life-threatening flash flood warning from NWS.

Swanson sent about half of his team to Edenville and Jerome townships to assist with the evacuation while the remaining firefighters were posted at the station to monitor the situation. His biggest concern that night was keeping track of his team amid the ensuing chaos.

"We put everything we had talked about into play. I think that's what helped," Swanson said.

Around 6:40 p.m. Tuesday, Midland residents received a formal announcement to vacate areas west of Eastman and south of US-10. Coughlin estimates that the evacuation, which involved about 10,000 people, was completed in four hours.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime event for anyone. I was extremely proud of how the department and the city

handled this event," Coughlin said.

By Wednesday, additional resources were used to relieve emergency personnel, including the Cajun Army and Oakland County Incident Management Team. Through it all, Coughlin was impressed by how

different offices pulled together and managed the situation while preventing any loss of life.

"A lot of it was training and planning," Coughlin stated. "There was a little bit of providence involved as well."



Midland Fire Department Chief Chris Coughlin and Assistant Chief Josh Mosher drove up to Wixom and Sanford lakes on Tuesday, May 19, 2020 to assess conditions. They saw how the water levels were nearly overtopping the earthen works at both dams. Despite the dam spillways flowing at capacity, the water continued to rise. (Photo provided/Chris Coughlin)



Representatives from community groups and volunteers meet at the emergency operations center (EOC) for planning and logistics support on Thursday, May 21, 2020. (Photo provided/Chris Coughlin)



Midland Fire Department Chief Chris Coughlin took this picture during the 2017 flood near the Sanford Dam. However, conditions were quite similar to the 2020 flood. (Photo provided/Chris Coughlin)

One year later: Flood relief from afar

How flood relief efforts were supported nationally

ANDREW MULLIN

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The first time Brian Antisdel was in Midland, the city was under water.

While in Texas in May 2020, he received a phone call that his home state was flooding. With his dogs in the back seat, he hurdled down the long path to Michigan in his van. After 19 hours and a half, with minimal power naps, he was driving into the city.

He first noticed the water lines on the trees, then road closures, then downtown Midland engulfed by flood water. He said people were lost and stranded. Animals were dying. Sanford had houses floating down the road.

“It was powerful,” Antisdel said, who was originally from Dowagiac, Michigan. “All the water that was supposed to be in the river was in the streets. It was one of the worst disasters I ever dealt with.”

But as the national boots on-ground commander of the United Cajun Navy, an organization that responds to national disasters, he could not let his emotions overwhelm him. There was work to do.

He was one of many people who waded into Midland from out of town after the Edenville Dam failure last year. The flood put parts of Midland County under 10 feet of water and damaged over 4,000 homes. Volunteers from across the state and country helped with flood relief in the immediate aftermath and months after the flood.

Holly Miller, president and CEO of United Way of Midland, said the community received a lot of help from Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) groups. She said VOAD groups include religious organizations and disaster response teams.

These groups help with the immediate aftermath of a disaster. At Midland, this included mucking out homes, mold suppression and supply



Brian Antisdel stands next to his truck for a photo while providing recovery assistance during the mid-Michigan dam failures and flooding in May of 2020. (Photo provided/Brian Antisdel)



Brian Antisdel worked with other volunteers to provide recovery assistance during the mid-Michigan dam failures and flooding in May of 2020. (Photo provided/Brian Antisdel)

deliveries.

“Our VOAD groups were not here (in our) community to rebuild houses,” Miller said. “What they were here to do (was) stabilize.”

Antisdel said United Cajun Navy

is part of the VOAD coalition and helped stabilize Midland. His job is to come to a disaster first, assess the situation, and report back to the United Cajun Navy on what is needed.

With a team of navy members and residents, they began helping Midland — whether it was delivering water pallets, cooking for people, mucking out homes, or rebuilding them.

“It was just the most powerful thing ever to have everybody working together,” Antisdel said. “That never happens.”

Samaritans Purse, another VOAD group, also helped with flood relief. Program director Lorenzo Torres drove from his home state of North Carolina to Michigan the morning after the dam broke. His 10-and-a-half-hour car ride brought him to Midland, where he assessed the situation and requested supplies for the relief effort.

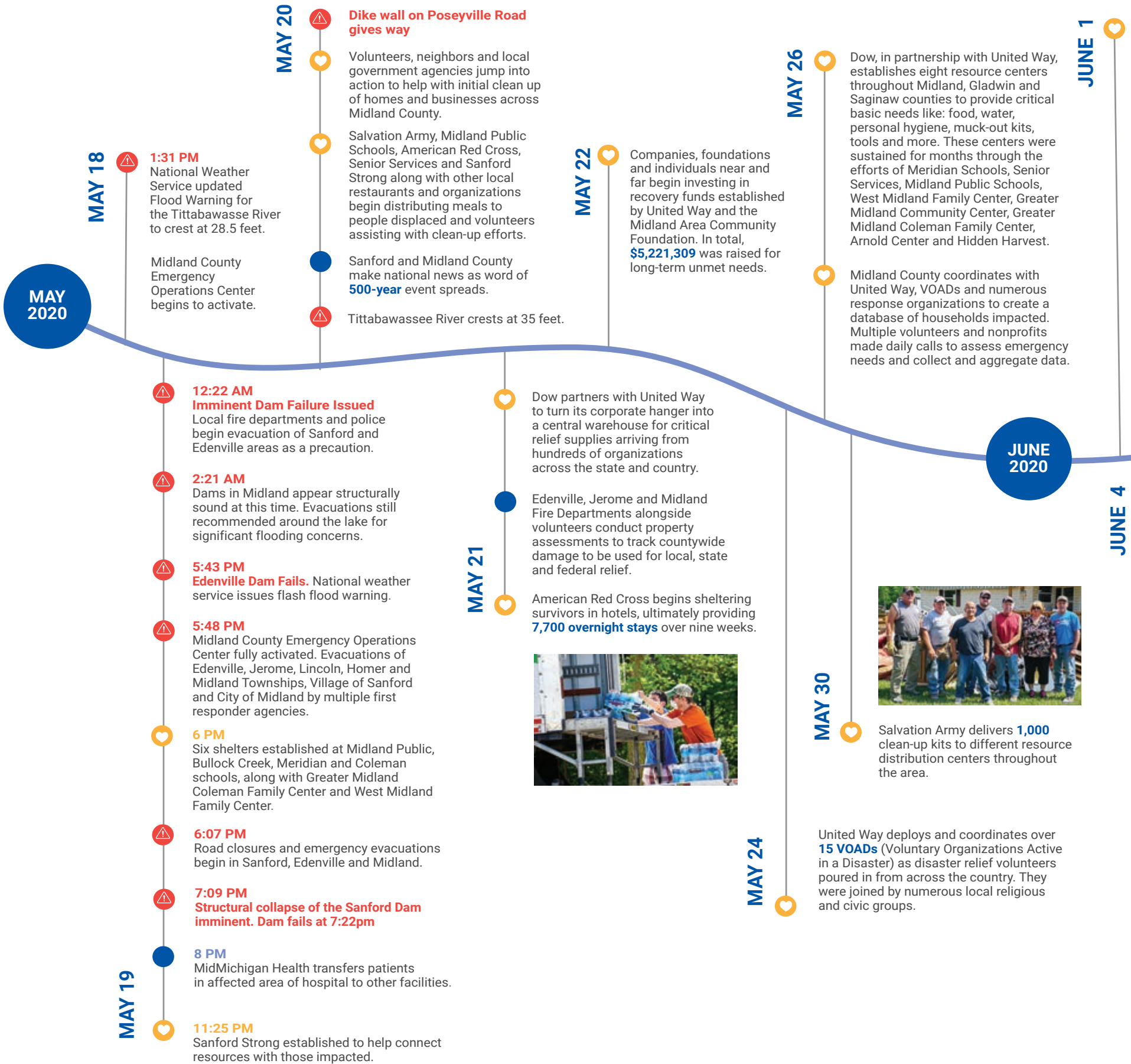
The organization partnered with the Calvary Baptist Church of Midland, where the group set up its base of operations. From there, Samaritans Purse sent out volunteers who went door to door asking if homeowners needed help cleaning out their homes. They also helped retrieve personal belongings and mucked out people’s homes.

“Our work comes with a high-quality control standard,” Torres said. “What we like to tell people is once we are done with their home, their home is essentially contractor ready.”

Altogether, United Cajun Navy was here for about two months, and Samaritans Purse stayed for about six weeks. However, Midland and its residents left a strong impact on Antisdel, who made friends while helping people in the county. He said many residents who volunteered were made members of the United Cajun Navy.

Cathy Mapes, a United Way volunteer who helped coordinate the VOAD volunteers, said she was told many times by the VOAD’s how strong the community response was to the flood. Antisdel said Midland’s response really helped save lives.

“If every community was like Midland, we could save a lot more people and animals,” Antisdel said. “It was stellar, day one.”



MAY 2020

JUNE 2020

MAY 18

1:31 PM
National Weather Service updated Flood Warning for the Tittabawassee River to crest at 28.5 feet.

Midland County Emergency Operations Center begins to activate.

MAY 20

Dike wall on Poseyville Road gives way

Volunteers, neighbors and local government agencies jump into action to help with initial clean up of homes and businesses across Midland County.

Salvation Army, Midland Public Schools, American Red Cross, Senior Services and Sanford Strong along with other local restaurants and organizations begin distributing meals to people displaced and volunteers assisting with clean-up efforts.

Sanford and Midland County make national news as word of **500-year** event spreads.

Tittabawassee River crests at 35 feet.

MAY 22

Companies, foundations and individuals near and far begin investing in recovery funds established by United Way and the Midland Area Community Foundation. In total, **\$5,221,309** was raised for long-term unmet needs.

MAY 26

Dow, in partnership with United Way, establishes eight resource centers throughout Midland, Gladwin and Saginaw counties to provide critical basic needs like: food, water, personal hygiene, muck-out kits, tools and more. These centers were sustained for months through the efforts of Meridian Schools, Senior Services, Midland Public Schools, West Midland Family Center, Greater Midland Community Center, Greater Midland Coleman Family Center, Arnold Center and Hidden Harvest.

Midland County coordinates with United Way, VOADs and numerous response organizations to create a database of households impacted. Multiple volunteers and nonprofits made daily calls to assess emergency needs and collect and aggregate data.

JUNE 1

12:22 AM Imminent Dam Failure Issued
Local fire departments and police begin evacuation of Sanford and Edenville areas as a precaution.

2:21 AM
Dams in Midland appear structurally sound at this time. Evacuations still recommended around the lake for significant flooding concerns.

5:43 PM Edenville Dam Fails. National weather service issues flash flood warning.

5:48 PM
Midland County Emergency Operations Center fully activated. Evacuations of Edenville, Jerome, Lincoln, Homer and Midland Townships, Village of Sanford and City of Midland by multiple first responder agencies.

6 PM
Six shelters established at Midland Public, Bullock Creek, Meridian and Coleman schools, along with Greater Midland Coleman Family Center and West Midland Family Center.

6:07 PM
Road closures and emergency evacuations begin in Sanford, Edenville and Midland.

7:09 PM Structural collapse of the Sanford Dam imminent. Dam fails at 7:22pm

8 PM
MidMichigan Health transfers patients in affected area of hospital to other facilities.

MAY 19

11:25 PM
Sanford Strong established to help connect resources with those impacted.

MAY 21

Dow partners with United Way to turn its corporate hanger into a central warehouse for critical relief supplies arriving from hundreds of organizations across the state and country.

Edenville, Jerome and Midland Fire Departments alongside volunteers conduct property assessments to track countywide damage to be used for local, state and federal relief.

American Red Cross begins sheltering survivors in hotels, ultimately providing **7,700 overnight stays** over nine weeks.



MAY 24

United Way deploys and coordinates over **15 VOADs** (Voluntary Organizations Active in a Disaster) as disaster relief volunteers poured in from across the country. They were joined by numerous local religious and civic groups.

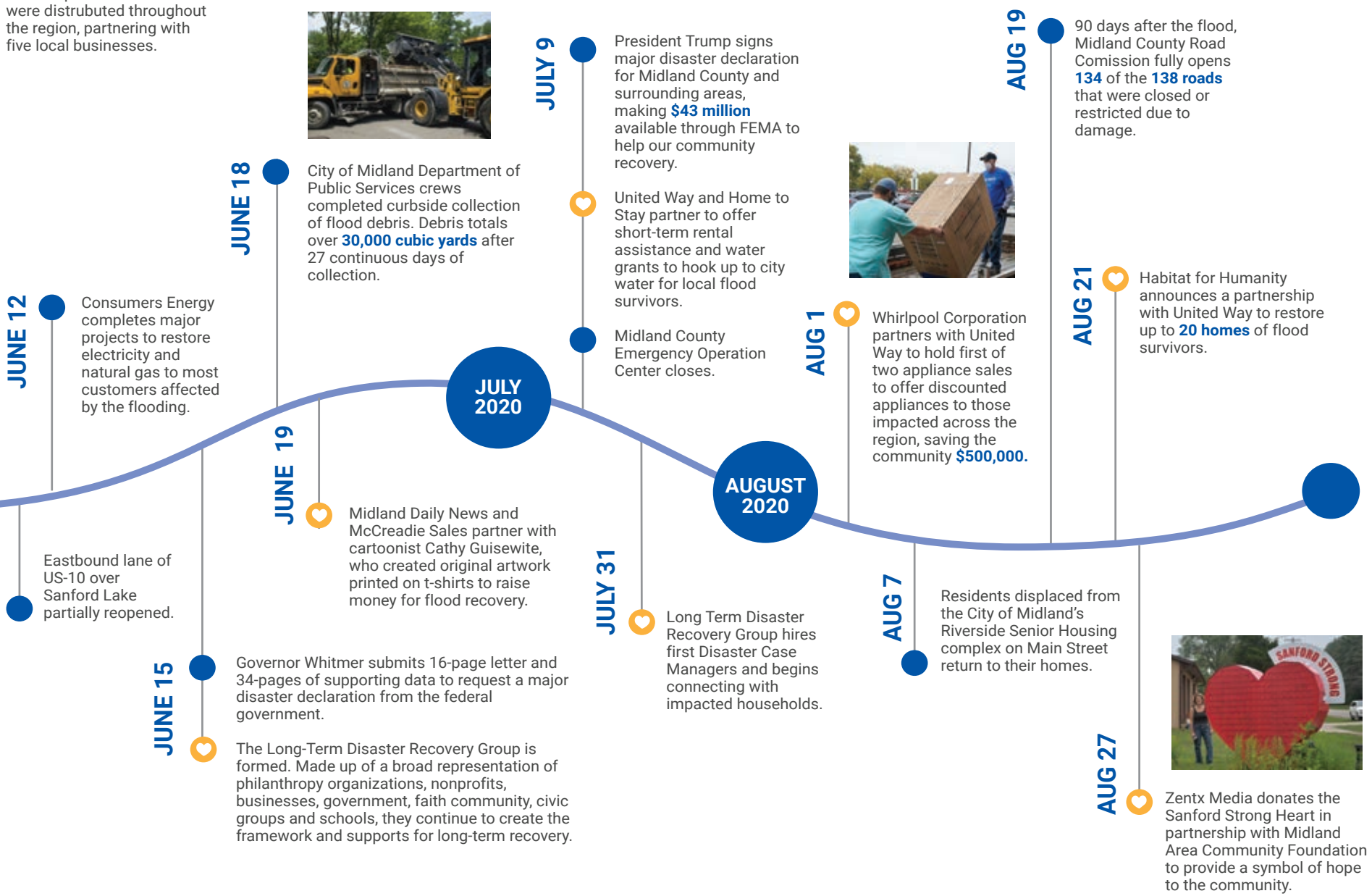
MAY 30

Salvation Army delivers **1,000** clean-up kits to different resource distribution centers throughout the area.



JUNE 4

Free laundry vouchers for flood impacted households were distributed throughout the region, partnering with five local businesses.



THE FIRST 90 DAYS

● = COMMUNITY RESPONSE ▲ = EMERGENCY RESPONSE ● = GOVERNMENT/INFRASTRUCTURE RESPONSE

In the first 90 days following the dam failures that resulted in a 500 year flood we saw neighbors, first responders and community organizations working around the clock to help those impacted with immediate needs and begin long term recovery. This timeline captures a very small snapshot of the many actions and efforts taken. Together, these actions—along with countless others—helped keep our neighbors safe, resulting in zero flood-related deaths.

Help close to home



Sanford residents and business owners continue to clear debris, water and mud from the downtown area Saturday, May 23, 2020. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

How local religious groups and organizations assisted flood relief efforts

ANDREW MULLIN
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When Midland and Sanford communities were enveloped by feet upon feet of floodwater, they did not let their lives completely wash away.

They took action.

Upon the immediate aftermath of last year's flooding caused by the Edenville and Sanford dam failures, many local religious groups and organizations rushed to help their fellow community members in any way they could. Whether it was through cleanup, donations, or providing shelter for outside disaster groups, these groups came to prop up the community they care about.

Sanford Strong
Sanford was hit especially hard

by the floods, being swept by up to 10 feet of water at some points. The sheer devastation of that town led to the creation of a new organization for the stabilization and rebuilding of the area.

Teresa Quintana is a real estate agent and Sanford resident who witnessed the devastation firsthand, with the town caked in mud, along with neighborhoods and businesses being destroyed.

"It was the worst thing I could have ever imagined," Quintana said.

"Downtown was just completely wiped out. We had roads and bridges that were completely wiped out."

The night of the flood, she co-founded Sanford Strong, which started as a Facebook group. She said the group was created to be a hub of information about what was happening with the flood.

After the true amount of damages was realized, Quintana said the group grew into a full-scale relief



Umbareen Jamil of the Islamic Center of Midland passes bottles of water to a recipient during a food distribution event Thursday, Oct. 1, 2020 at Cole's Wrecker Service and Garage in Sanford. **(Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)**

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effort. This meant helping clean out people's homes and connecting homeowners to resources. The Facebook group quickly grew, now standing at 12,000 members and 20-25 team members.

"Whether it is flood recovery or whether it is planning events, we're trying to work out a lot of things to try to keep the morale up in the community," Quintana said.

The group began clearing debris from people's homes and send contractors into neighborhoods. While the cleanup phase is mostly completed, Quintana said the community is currently in the rebuilding phase. Homeowners and businesses are in various stages of rebuilding. The organization has been working with the Long Term Disaster Recovery Group for flood relief on these rebuilding projects.

Sanford Strong is also helping to develop a new park area, since the

previous one was destroyed by the flood. A new beer garden in Sanford is also being worked on that would benefit several non-profits, Quintana said.

Events are currently being planned by Sanford Strong around the time of the one-year anniversary of the flood on May 19. Even after flood relief is finished, the organization will not be leaving anytime soon.

"Sanford Strong is not going anywhere, and it is not going to stop," Quintana said. "Even when we are fully recovered, we are probably going to have events like every single year."

Religious groups help flooded neighbors

Many religious groups in Midland County raced out to help those from their church and the community at large, motivated by a feeling of duty to their faiths and communities.

Gib Giblin, a pastor for Midland Evangelical Free Church (E-Free), said he first checked a list of church members who lived in the evacuated zone. He then checked on them and



"Sanford Strong" is spelled out along a fence across the street from Penny Tyler, whose childhood home was demolished earlier Wednesday, July 8, 2020 in preparation for a new home to be built free of cost thanks to Great Lakes Homes in Freeland. **(Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)**

conducted door-to-door check-ins with other households affected by the flood.

Working with the crisis response group from their denomination, church volunteers helped with mold suppression, mucking, and drywall removal. They also helped people go through the processes of FEMA requests and building permits, said E-Free's Julie Garl.

"We felt in the wake of something that was so devastating, to be able to provide assistance and to really do something for these people, it was a huge blessing," Garl said.

Umbareen Jamil, outreach coordinator for the Islamic Center of Midland, said she and her colleague, Haley Lodhi, wanted to do something immediately in the wake of the flood. So, they started by delivering bagged lunches and "adopting" five families. They would deliver items, such as towels and bedsheets, that the families said they needed.

However, Jamil said they knew the victims needed more help, so

they began assisting the rebuilding efforts. This was helped by the massive amounts of financial donations coming from people in Sanford and Midland, so they were able to keep doing more.

In total, the center helped between 100-110 families and raised about \$115,000, something Jamil was surprised by. She wanted to help out the community and hope their help broke down Muslim stereotypes.

"My faith teaches me I have to take care of my community," Jamil said. "That is an intrinsic part."

Despite being in the evacuation area, Calvary Baptist Church in Midland was only grazed by the flood and received no damage. Pastor Mark Dickerson said the church saw this as God showing them what they should do in the face of the flood.

"We were praying that God would just show us what we should do," Dickerson said. "We really felt the fact that God kept our building dry,



Umbareen Jamil, left, and Haley Lodhi, right, of the Islamic Center of Midland, pose for a photo Wednesday with Sanford resident Lori Brown, center, after Brown received a check for \$500 from Reliable Plumbing and Heating to help fix her furnace, which was damaged in the flood. **(Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)**

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he wanted us to use our building and our facilities as a place to be a help to people.”

So when the non-denominational evangelical Christian organization that helps with disaster relief, Samaritans Purse, called Calvary Baptist, the church began a partner-

ship to help the community. They let the organization stay at the church while they tended to the community.

Dickerson said the immediate relief response was to help out church members, but they soon began asking members if they knew other community members who needed help. The church focused on collecting donations and delivering them to flood victims, including cleaning products and clothing. Later, the church began to help peo-

ple financially.

Messiah Lutheran Church in Midland has its own flood relief team, in which church office manager Jackie Maxwell is a member. When the flood first happened, church volunteers scrambled to help with cleanup and donation deliveries, such as laundry baskets. They helped with the rebuilding efforts, putting up a lot of drywall, she said.

The religious groups are still helping with flood relief today. For

instance, Maxwell said the Messiah team is down to three people, but the church is helping residents finish rebuilding their homes and beautifying the outside of them. They are also helping replace belongings that may have washed away, including Christmas decorations.

“We always have our hands out in the community, and we want to love and serve people,” Maxwell said.

Help from our schools



Volunteers assist evacuated Midland residents at a temporary shelter at Midland High School Wednesday, May 20, 2020. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

Schools lodged evacuees, coordinated flood relief

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When many residents in the Meridian Public Schools district were told to evacuate from their homes ahead of the imminent breach of the Edenville and Sanford dams last May, Meridian Public Schools Superintendent Craig Carmoney and his staff knew that time was of the essence.

Residents needed to understand the urgent need to leave their homes.

And they needed to know where to go for shelter.

“We got as much information as we could out there as quickly as possible,” Carmoney said.

And the Meridian schools — at that time devoid of students due to the statewide mandatory closure due to COVID-19 — were about to become a focal point for flood relief throughout the school district, which includes Sanford, Hope and Edenville.

“It’s our job (as a school district) to serve our students and families. We saw a call to duty and a call to action,” Carmoney said.

For an approximately 24-hour

period that included the night of Monday, May 18, Meridian Junior High School on M-18 was designated as an emergency shelter for people who had been ordered to evacuate in anticipation of the dam breaches, which happened around 6 p.m. Tuesday, May 19.

More than 100 cots were set up in the school, but most evacuees chose to sleep in their cars in the school parking lot because of concerns about the spread of COVID-19, Carmoney recalled.

“We only ran that (shelter) for a short period of time, and as soon as the dams failed, they evacuated our shelter because it was hard to know

— would the impact (of the flooding) make this area unsafe, and this was part of the evacuation zone,” Carmoney explained. “And the potential for roads and bridges to be out was a concern.”

But as soon as the flood waters had receded and people began to return home to take stock of their homes and possessions, Meridian Junior High was converted into a donation and distribution center and a communications hub to connect the many residents in need to the many volunteers who were ready to help them.



Gov. Gretchen Whitmer tours the temporary shelter at Midland High School Wednesday, May 20, 2020. Whitmer spoke of response efforts to severe flooding caused by dam failures upstream of the Tittabawassee River. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

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Donations poured into the school — everything from bottled water to cleaning and disinfecting supplies to pet food, even several new bicycles.

Residents whose homes had been flooded drove into the school parking lot and told volunteers what they needed, and volunteers carried those items out to the cars.

Inside the junior high library, student volunteers took calls from flooded residents as well as those who wanted to help. And a volunteer check-in station was set up in Sanford, a couple of miles to the south.

“A tremendous number of people came into the community to help. So we saw a need to organize volunteers to send them into the community,”

Carmoney said. “And we used our school buses to transport volunteers to minimize traffic. That went on for several days as well.

“As schools, we are good at creating systems to serve our families and students,” he added. “We saw that as an opportunity and a need where we could step into that role.”

Meridian Junior High served continuously as a flood resource center for about three months, until mid-August, only about two weeks before school would be starting up again.

“It was an amazing thing to see the community collectively come together,” Carmoney said. “So many people in the community stepped up into leadership roles to organize volunteer work.”

In the immediate aftermath of the flooding, Meridian Public Schools also created a link where people

could make monetary donations to help flooded residents in the school district. That link ended up raising \$75,000 that supported over 140 families, Carmoney said.

While Meridian Junior High served as a temporary shelter for those living east of Sanford Lake, Coleman High School was designated as a shelter for those west of the lake.

About 47 people stayed in the CHS gym the night of May 18, Coleman Community Schools Superintendent Jen McCormack said at the time.

Midland High School served as shelter for four nights

About 12 miles southeast of Meridian Junior High, Midland High School was also pressed into use as an emergency shelter, lodging a total of about 150 people between Tuesday, May 19 and Saturday, May 23.

Many of those residents were from

the Riverside Place senior apartments on Main Street, which underwent extensive flood-related repairs before reopening in early August.

The Midland High shelter closed once longer-term accommodations were found for everyone who was still displaced.

Midland Public Schools Superintendent Michael Sharrow said it was initially an all-hands-on-deck scenario to make sure enough help was available to staff the emergency shelter, especially nurses to care for elderly and disabled residents.

“I called Jerry Wasserman, our former school board president. Knowing so many people in town, Jerry was able to call a couple of nurses he knew,” Sharrow said.

Eventually, thanks to networking through the CMU College of Medi-



Residents of Sanford and Wixom Lakes exit a shelter at Meridian Junior High Tuesday, May 19, 2020 after spending the night there due to an evacuation order the night before. The emergency alert after midnight warned of "imminent dam failure." (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

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cine, nurses from around the state, some of whom had been laid off from their jobs, signed up to work 24-hour shifts at the temporary shelter.

"What hit us was how fortunate we were. Without (the nurses who stepped up to volunteer), it would have been a totally different story," Sharrow said.

Cots didn't arrive at the school until 3 a.m. the first night of the shelter, so it was a challenging first night, he said. But by the next day, May 20, just like at Meridian, people began to bring an abundance of donations of food, water, and supplies to the high school. And more than 400 volunteers stepped up to staff the shelter.

"Within a 24-hour period, we had hundreds of people working shifts.

What a great sign from our community," Sharrow said, adding that so many items were donated to the shelter that many of them were taken to other distribution centers. "When we shut the shelter down, it took another day of logistics in moving the food and supplies to the best spots where they were needed."

Bullock Creek also opened its doors to displaced residents. Yet another Midland County school, Bullock Creek High School, opened its doors as an emergency shelter the week of the dam failures.

Bullock Creek Superintendent Shawn Hale said within 20 minutes after the Edenville Dam was breached on May 19, he got a call from the Midland County Emergency Management office indicating that BCHS would be needed as a shelter.

"We gathered towels and toiletries. Our food service director, our business manager, our social worker,

and several other people stepped up (to mobilize people and resources for the shelter)," Hale said.

About 18 people stayed in the high school gym that first night of May 19, with cots arriving around 2 a.m.

Just like at Meridian, many people slept in their cars in the parking lot rather than go inside the school, Hale said. The number of those staying inside the school steadily decreased each night.

"We continued to staff our shelter for about four days. By the fourth day, most people were able to return to their homes or they found an alternate place to stay," Hale said.

And donations of food, water and supplies came into the school throughout that week and into the next. On May 26, Dow and United Way took over the collection and distribution of donations.

"All of that supply was moved to (another location) and distributed

out from there to people in need," Hale said, recalling that some people donated brand-new sheets and pillows that were still in their packaging.

Many Bullock Creek staff members also volunteered to help with crews that were cleaning out flooded homes throughout the region, Hale noted.

"You just do what you can do and just be open to serve however you can," he said. "I had people willing to sign up for shifts. I didn't have to ask; people just stepped up and volunteered."

Amid all that, the temporary closing of parts of Poseyville Road and M-20 due to flooding left some Bullock Creek residents having to drive 90 minutes to get into the city of Midland, Hale noted.

One year later: What's next?



The Tittabawassee River winds through the lakebed of Sanford Lake, now covered in new growth, Thursday, Sept. 3, 2020 in Sanford. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

Bringing the Midland area back to normal after last year's flood could take years

ANDREW MULLIN,
MITCHELL KUKULKA

Bringing things “back to normal” after a natural disaster is not a quick process.

Bringing the Midland area back to normal after last year's flood from the Edenville dam failures could take years, even with many different sectors of the community working diligently to repair what was lost.

Here are the projects and timeframe estimates from different community groups on flood recovery.

Four Lakes Task Force

In January, ownership of the dams and lakes along the Tittabawassee River system was transferred from Boyce Hydro to the Four Lakes Task Force. The transfer included about 300 parcels/lots of land, with a total of more than 6,000 acres.

Through it finally has ownership of the dams, FLTF has been working constantly to rehabilitate the properties since last May.

Between the Edenville and Sanford dams, roughly \$16 million is needed to finish stabilization efforts to ensure reconstruction and repair

work can begin in spring 2022, said FLTF president David Kepler.

For the Secord and Smallwood dams, FLTF is working to finish engineering work and flood studies to begin reconstruction around the same time of year.

“The big things we’re focused on right now are finishing up the recovery effort and getting prepared to start to do the restoration of the dams and the bottomlands,” Kepler said.

Formed in 2018, FLTF is the delegated authority working on behalf of Midland and Gladwin counties to oversee the dams and lakes along the Tittabawassee River system.

City of Midland

The City of Midland has multiple construction projects moving forward to repair buildings damaged by the flood, said assistant city manager David Keenan. The three major ones are the Currie Municipal Golf Course, Riverside Place and the Grace A. Dow Memorial Library.

For Riverside, the city is waiting on construction bids to come for the buildings needed repairs. Keenan said it will take multiple months for the construction project to be completed once a construction team is awarded a bid.

Similar to that, the library needs mechanical repairs and work on the



Volunteers begin assembling one of 50 “House in a Box” kits containing brand new household necessities (couch, bed linens, dinette, dishes, etc.) to distribute to flood survivors Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 at the United Way of Midland County warehouse. The project is a collaborative effort between Long Term Disaster Recovery/United Way of Midland County and the Disaster Services Corporation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

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lower level before the building can reopen to the public. Midland City Council recently approved construction bids for this project and will take an estimated six months to complete.

Currie Golf Course needs multiple building repairs, turf replacement and hole repairs, Kennan said. The city is also working on projects related to stormwater and wastewater projects with costs estimated at \$50 million.

Along with construction, the city is working on administering a property acquisition program to help residents in a flood plain apply for federal grants to relocate, Keenan said.

“Midland is an intelligent community, it is an involved community, and at some level, they are going to be sort of finishing what we’re doing,” Keenan said.

County of Midland

Midland County has its own flood recovery projects in the works spearheaded by emergency management coordinator Jeniffer Boyer.

The first is a “floodplain management study” with the Army Corps of Engineers.

“(The Army Corps of Engineers)

are going to study the 100-year floodplain to really identify areas and communities where we could possibly do mitigation projects,” Boyer said.

Boyer is also working with the United States Geological Survey on a “flood mapper” tool that could potentially predict the impact of future flooding events.

Midland businesses

On top of the COVID-19 pandemic, local businesses in Midland County took a huge blow from the flood. Midland Business Alliance President Tony Stamas said there are currently four or five businesses still closed from the flood last year, based on the businesses they alliance works with.

He said businesses across the county face a variety of impacts from the flood, whether it was a few feet of water, or complete devastation of their buildings.

The business alliance has been trying to help businesses and homeowners by going through legislators to get the needed assistance. He also wants to help businesses figure reopening plans from COVID-19 restrictions.

“We have a great community that finds solutions and we want to make sure we are helping them find those solutions and helping those busi-



The children’s section remains devoid of books at the Grace A. Dow Memorial Library in January of 2021, while still undergoing renovations after sustaining severe damage during the mid-Michigan dam failures and flood in May. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)



Boyce Hydro signs are posted near the Edenville Dam September 22, 2020. (Katy Kildee/kkildee@mdn.net)

nesses thrive,” Stamas said.

Long Term Disaster Recovery Group

United Way of Midland President and CEO Holly Miller also chairs the Long-Term Disaster Recovery Group, a group of local of non-profits, businesses, faith-based organizations and government leaders. The collective helps flood victims by guiding them through a process of recovery and home rebuilding.

The group’s efforts will take years to complete, with the group still

currently working with individuals with home rebuilding and might take another 18 or 24 months to do so.

Miller said they are currently utilizing a FEMA grant during the warmer months to add regional infrastructure and staff to rebuild homes and make them livable.

“When we say long term recovery effort, it really means long term,” Miller said. “We are nowhere near done. Knowing where the finish line is hard to predict. We will know when we get there.”

RECOVERY IN ACTION

Our strength is in our collaboration. The Long Term Disaster Recovery Group is made up of a broad representation of philanthropy organizations, nonprofits, businesses, government, faith community, civic groups and schools to help create the framework and supports for long-term recovery in Midland County.

Through leveraging Federal and State relief funds along with volunteer and in-kind donated materials, we have stretched our local dollars to have the biggest impact as we continue to help survivors recover.



INVESTMENTS TO DATE | \$3,310,615

Habitat For Humanity Rebuild Projects | \$250,000
2 home rebuilds complete & 2 more in planning

Long Term Disaster Recovery Repair & Rebuild Projects

Projects approved in Midland | 33 homes | Range \$1,000 - \$160,000
Projects approved in Sanford | 56 homes | Range \$1,000 - \$140,000

Short Term Housing Assistance | \$114,202

Stable housing secured for 72 displaced individuals

Water Restoration Assistance | \$233,717

Well Repair/Replacement or City Water Hookup for 64 households

House in a Box | \$125,000

50 kits purchased to provide household necessities saving \$58,000

Laundry Vouchers | \$17,130

IN-KIND SUPPORT | \$2,900,000

Basic Needs | \$1,400,000

Food, tools, personal care items, cleaning supplies and more

Whirlpool Corporation Appliance Sale | \$500,000

Discounted appliances saved community members \$500,000

Building Supplies | \$1,000,000

Donated siding, insulation, drywall and more have been leveraged in rebuild efforts across the community

HELPING HANDS

Volunteer Coordination

To date, we have coordinated over 5,681 volunteers who invested over 27,286 hours. This has saved us nearly \$750,000 in labor costs with no reported Covid-19 spread.

LEVERAGING FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

FEMA and SBA Assistance

We worked diligently with County officials to ensure data was collected and shared to receive the National Disaster Declaration. To date, nearly \$49 million have been invested in area survivors through FEMA dollars and low-interest SBA loans: all dollars that we have not had to spend locally.