High winds, heavy rain cover the area (originally published 6-24-10)

by Marla Blair

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Beardstown seemed to be in the line of fire on Monday night/Tuesday morning when the wind took down trees, peeled roofs from buildings and wadded metal roofs, plastic toys and sheds into strange shapes like pieces of paper. According to the National Weather Service in Lincoln, the storm was not a tornado, but there should be a special name for a weather front that can leave behind a calling card this extensive.

Beardstown Public Works Director Todd Harmeyer believes the service and trusts their judgement, but agrees it was a beauty of a storm. His crews worked from 1:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Tuesday.

“We’re going to work 12-hour shifts, working 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. until this mess is cleaned up,” Harmeyer said. “We’ll follow the usual daily routes and return as many times as necessary. I think it should take about a month.

“And, we’re not doing any favors, so calling because you know somebody isn’t going to work,” he continued, “this is everybody’s mess and we’ll do it methodically so we don’t miss anything.”

What will take the longest is the cemeteries. Harmeyer knows the delicate job of untangling branches and uprighting stones will not be an easy task, or a quick one. Foundations, stones and sidewalks will need to be replaced and repaired with precision and care, and that will take time and patience.

Harmeyer acknowledged that it will take a lot of help to clear the rubble and clear the yards and streets of debris. On Tuesday other departments and crews came out in force—Tim Icenogle and the Cass County Highway Department; Keith Hudson and a crew from Beardstown Township; local contractors Albert Ross and Sammy Surratt; Greg Littleton from Arenzville and his crew, to name a few.

Wednesday morning 50 residents from the Illinois Department of Corrections Green County Work Camp began helping, thanks to the coordination of Russ Steele.

“We have helped other towns and they have helped us, but we haven’t asked them this time because there was an enormous response from all these places,” Harmeyer said. “I am keeping it local, too. We’ve had some calls from storm chasers who want to come in and make a buck, but then they’ll be gone. We’ll keep the business in town and in the area. I’ve had kids as young as 14 want to volunteer and we find them something to do. It’s appreciated. We’ve hired a few local guys temporarily to increase the crews and that will give us some ongoing manpower when the outside help has to go back to work elsewhere.

“Sammy Surratt is doing the ‘leaners’, the dangerous trees that other crews aren’t equipped for,” Harmeyer explained, “and Albert Ross has been here forever, he has the experience to take on some difficult situations. We need all these people and they came without calling.”

A wind meter on the roof of the high school registers to 100 miles per hour—it topped out early Tuesday morning. The weather station stated the storm was not a tornado because there was no rotation to the wind. And there was no path through town. Instead no one was spared and every corner received something to remember in the way of broken limbs, downed trees, twisted fencing, a yard full of leaves and branches, or a hole in the roof.

The high-powered wind continued east and several properties on the Chandlerville blacktop also sustained damage. But by the time it reached the middle of the county it seems to have lost steam and left a lot of standing water, but not as much structural damage or scattered vegetation.

Harmeyer wanted to also acknowledge Roger Lauder for helping with forms and process to help qualify the city for assistance. He also is grateful to the mayor and city council for believing in his ability to make decisions and standing behind him when disasters strike, or when work needs to be done.

“They give me full reign to do it right. There is no red tape and I move along and make the decisions,” Harmeyer stated. “I have a lot of pride in this community and these types of circumstances is one reason why. People come together and help when needed, and you can stand back and see then work together.”

When everybody else has done what they can and returns to their usual areas of activity, Harmeyer and his crew will stay with the cleanup.

“I told my men,” he said, “ everything we do shows–sidewalks, water lines, street repairs, tree-trimming, everything. When we’re done the town and visitors will see how well we did our job and it will look good.”

NOTE: The American Red Cross has set up a shelter in the high school. Enter the school on the East side of the parking lot. Meals are being served at the shelter. Call the local office at 217-243-6641 to set up an appointment with caseworkerss to determine what disaster relief assistance is available.