

BEGIN PLANNING FOR THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE! PGS 24-25

MINNESOTA Township Insider

2017 Summer Issue



READY OR NOT...

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR AN EMERGENCY?

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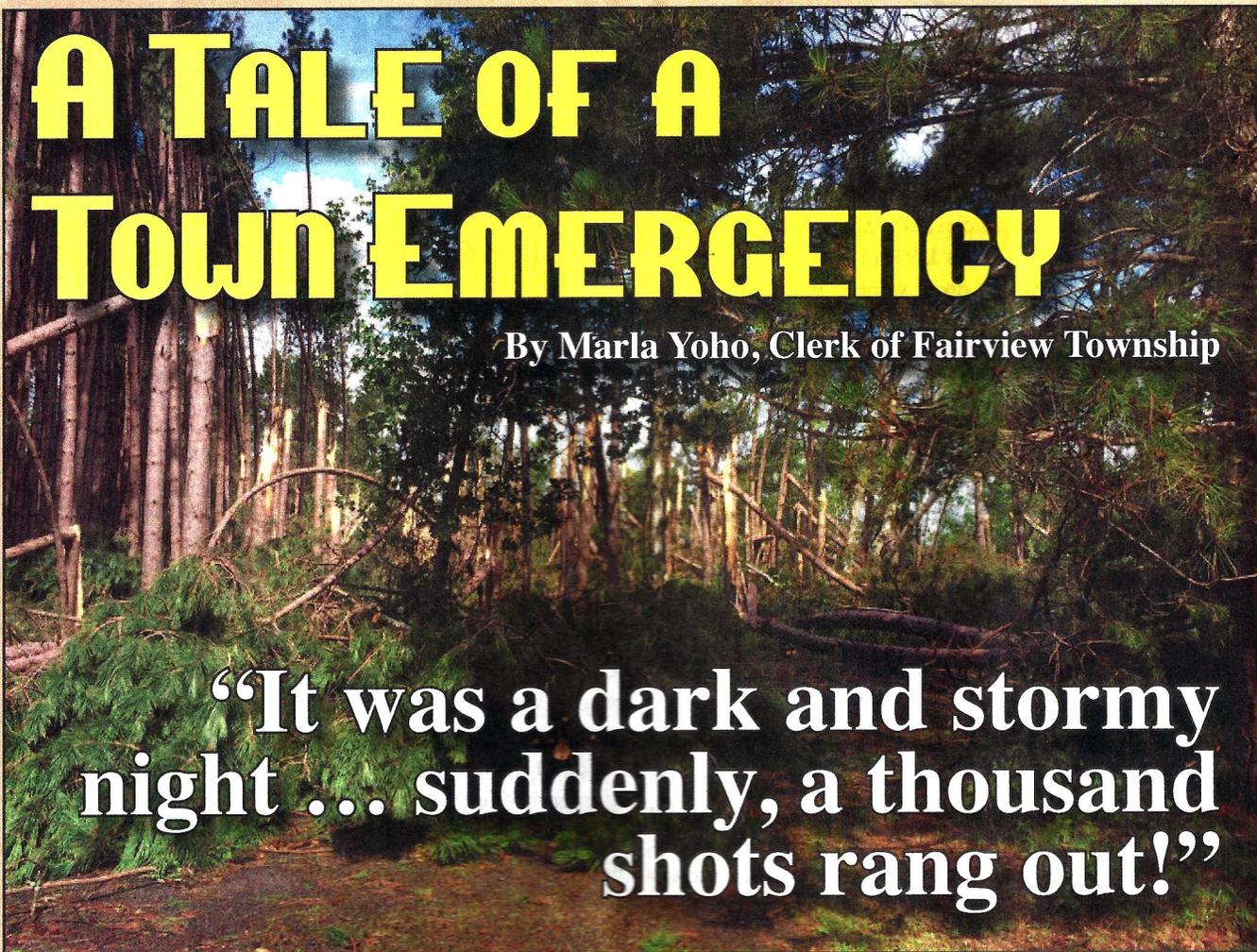
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A TALE OF A TOWN EMERGENCY

By Marla Yoho, Clerk of Fairview Township

“It was a dark and stormy night ... suddenly, a thousand shots rang out!”

I always thought about starting a story with that line, but it was going to a pulpy fiction mystery, not a real-life drama, and the shots were supposed to be, well, shots! They weren't supposed to be the snapping and cracking of thousands of trees as our surrounding forests were uprooted and thrown onto the homes and roads in our township. The beautiful trees that had stood across our township for up to 150-years, creating our environment, seclusion, and identity, suddenly became our enemy.

Fairview Township is located in the heart of the Brainerd lakes area at the southern end of Cass County. The curving shoreline of Gull Lake forms our eastern border, and because of that, the township covers almost 40 square miles. We have a year-round population of 828, but over 50% of our properties are seasonal, or vacation homes. In the summer months we are a hub for hikers in the Pillsbury State Forest, campers at the Rock Lake Campground, and vacationers at the surrounding resorts like Maddens and Craguns.

On the evening of July 12th, 2015, in the midst of our busy resort and vacation season, a Supercell storm, with straight-line winds nearly the strength of a Category 1 hurricane, blew through town. It left behind a swath of destruction and changed our lush landscape forever. Our weather warning sirens sounded and the NIXLE alert system advised of approaching severe

weather. Miraculously, no one was injured. In the daylight following the storm, residents discovered parts of roofs were blown off, buildings and cars were crushed, and the roads were blocked by a tangled mess of trees and power lines. While the county workers tried to open the primary roads, our local fire department responded to emergency calls from people who were trapped in their homes by power lines. The Cass County Sheriff's Office set up sentry points to keep out unnecessary traffic in the hardest hit areas. Many of us spent the whole day just trying to escape our driveways, get the trees lifted off our houses, and cover the gaps in our roofs. In the meantime, our local contract road crew and an area excavating company worked to just clear a passage lane on our roads. Electricity and phone services were out over much of the township, and cell service was limited, all of which hindered communication.

When I finally made it to the townhall on Tuesday morning, I was excited to find it was in a small area that still had electricity and phone service. Because of that, it became the Emergency Management center for the surrounding cities and townships. The bad news was, large trees were lying on and through the roof of the town hall and attached fire hall. The Sheriff's Deputy in charge of the event brought me up to date on the overall situation and then took me on a tour of the town-

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ship. This “road trip” not only gave me the chance to make a preliminary assessment of the damage on each of the roads, but we were also able to knock on doors of damaged houses and do welfare checks.

The Board got together for a regularly scheduled Board meeting that night and then tabled it so we could meet again in one week for an update session. Our county Emergency Man-

ing. I made up special load sheets so all crews were tracking loads with consistency, which helped when filing the HSEM claim.

There was so much debris that our contract maintenance crew couldn't handle the entire job, and all the local tree companies were already working in other areas. Our regular contract crew cleared the less damaged roads while five crews from a national tree company handled the heavier damage. The County Highway Dept. got permission for us to dump all our tree debris in a local gravel pit until it could be chipped. Unfortunately, 9 days into the clean-up, while we had six huge commercial trucks, each making up to 12 round trips a day, the gravel pit owner realized that the debris pile was more than they anticipated, and they locked the gate without any notice. There we were with full trucks and hard-at-work crews, and nowhere to go. I was finally able to locate another gravel pit we could use, but it was much farther away and there were overhead power lines to contend with, which limited the size of the loads.

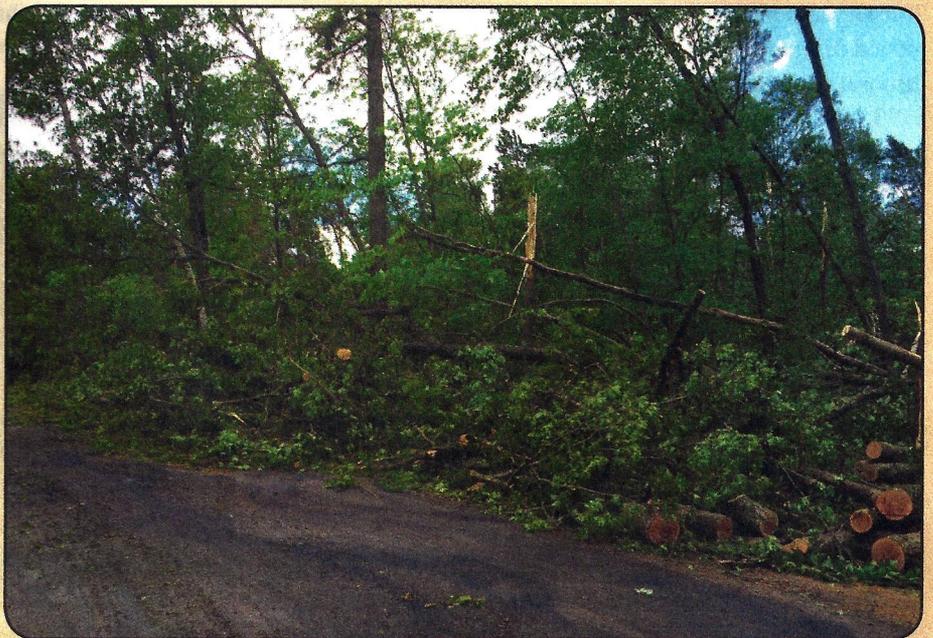


agement Director held meetings to keep the area administrators up to date on Disaster Declarations, emergency resource centers, and guidelines for the detailed documenting requirements that would allow us to qualify for reimbursement from the state Homeland Security Emergency Management Dept. (HSEM).

I contacted MATIT concerning the damage to the buildings. We brought in an excavator to remove the trees and then got the roof covered over temporarily. The damages totaled \$19,290 and, after our deductible, we received \$16,790 in insurance coverage.

The amount of tree debris in the right-of-ways was astounding and it was almost impossible to estimate how much there was. Using some figures from the county Highway Engineer, the original clean-up estimate was \$375,000. We were carrying approximately \$365,000 in available cash and had \$124,000 in a CD as reserves, so we thought we were going to be okay. The administrator from an adjoining city and I worked together to arrive at a figure of \$7.75 per cubic yard for removal and hauling of tree debris, which our Board approved by resolution at the tabled Board meet-

As we got into the clean-up, we realized the costs were going to be much higher than anticipated. Even after cashing in our CD's we were going to be short by about \$150,000. I worked with a local banker who was willing to give us a 90-day emergency line of credit. We were so desperate to get the money into our account to pay claims that our Chair and I met the banker at a golf course and signed the papers on the hood of a pick-up truck.



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The HSEM reimburses 75% of public clean-up expenses, but they only issue one check, and it is to reimburse payments that have already been made, so we couldn't count on that money to pay the actual bills.



Emergency road opening expenses were \$23,468. Our truckers hauled 1,213 extremely large loads containing 85,876 cubic yards of tree debris at a cost of \$680,593. An added surprise came when we were billed \$51,561 for the chipping of 20,743 yards of debris and 403 tree stumps that had to be removed from the original gravel pit. (You do have to document disposal of the debris for HSEM.) Our total expenditures were \$723,350, which literally left us with less than \$3,000 in the township checkbook after paying the final bills on September 18th. On September 23rd I filed the necessary paperwork with HSEM, including copies of all invoices and logger load sheets. On October 21st we received a 51 page summary of our claim from HSEM for verification, and on November 20th, they deposited \$530,738 in our checking account. We received the entire 75% of our expenses, less the building insurance payment from MATIT. The township still had to carry the difference, or a total unbudgeted expense of \$175,822.

It was a long journey from storm to having money in the bank, and we learned that having a healthy reserve is a necessity. The levy approved at the annual meeting in 2015 was \$285,000, but we made an emergency decision to raise it to \$310,000 when we had to certify it to the County Auditor in September. We replenished all of our funds by 75% when we

received the reimbursement.

Many hard lessons came out of this experience. First of all, Township Board members may have a commitment to make decisions for the township, but in the event of an emergency, their responsibilities to their home and "day" job may have to take precedence. That may leave much of the responsibility for dealing with the emergency to only one or two people. It is imperative to have a written guide or directory that provides names and numbers of approved alternative resources in the event primary resources are destroyed or overwhelmed. All Board members should have copies of those lists at home in the event the town hall is damaged, or the power or phone service is useless. At the time of the storm, broadband was literally being trenched in to our township, so we were still on dial-up internet. After the storm, it took 20 minutes just to get an email to "send", so wide spread communication was impossible. Broadband service is now available throughout the township, but if the power is out people aren't looking at their computers. We now have some expanded capabilities through the NIXLE alert system provided through our Sheriff's office. While we can't input messages ourselves, the Sheriff's office will broadcast text messages carrying information of importance, such as emergency shelters, to a specific area.

As a final thought, we couldn't have gotten through this experience without the Cass County Sheriff and his Deputies ... our "Knights in Sheriff's armor!" They did welfare checks, dealt with the unscrupulous "tree gypsies" that descended on the area, and did their best to calm and protect our residents, many of whom were without power for up to a week. Normally, we hardly ever see them in our area, but they sure were here when we needed them.

Marla Yoho was first elected as Clerk in 1993 to attend Fairview Township's once-a-month meetings, but as the expectations of residents became greater (and since she and her husband had sold their amusement park business), her position was converted to "appointed" in 2007 and she started keeping official office hours at the town hall. This is her 25th year in service. Marla was elected as a Director on the Cass County Assn. of Townships in 2005 and became the Secretary-Treasurer in 2008. She also works with Sharon Anderson, the Cass County Auditor-Treasurer, as an Election Judge Trainer and to handle special elections.