

Commemorative event held to mark 40th anniversary of Grand Valley tornado

Written By PAULA BROWN

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Town of Grand Valley marked the anniversary of a tornado that swept through and devastated the community 40 years ago.

Residents gathered at the Grand Valley and District Community Centre, located at 90 Main St. N, on Saturday (May 31), for a commemorative event marking the 40th anniversary since the 1985 tornado hit Grand Valley.

"It's an event that changed the town and it was a tragedy for a lot of people so certainly those are memories that we need to keep alive," said Grand Valley Mayor Steve Solomon. "But it also made the town come together. We had people from all over helping. There's a lot of kind people in this town and county and they show it when the chips are down."

During the event, a documentary called "Twister in the Valley" showcased the damage caused by the natural disaster and how the community has changed since. Exhibits of old articles and photographs retold the experiences of residents and those who came to help in the wake of the disaster.

A life-long resident of Grand Valley, Mayor Solomon vividly remembers the day the tornado hit the community as he stood roughly 200 yards from the epicentre of damage.

"We didn't know what was happening. We went scrambling for cover and when I got up it was a nice day, but somebody yelled out that the library was gone. We went running up the street and sure enough the whole town looked like it was gone; it was shocking. We didn't hardly know which way to turn. Time went fast. Time went slow," recalled Solomon. "But we all pulled together and got things back."

Resident Randy McClelland was working in Orangeville at the time the 1985 tornado swept through the community but recalls the scene of destruction as he attempted to make it home to his wife and children.

"I wouldn't wish this on anybody, it was awful," he said.

McClelland further spoke with the Free Press about the Town of Grand Valley recognizing the 40-year-old event.

"At times, some of the pictures were painful to see because it was such a destruction," said McClelland. "It's important to remember though. Maybe not the tornado, but the people in the community who came together and worked together; we had a goal to get us back up on our feet again."

Shortly before 5 p.m. on May 31, 1985, a tornado touched down in Grand Valley creating a path of damage stretching across Dufferin County. The storm was one of several tornadoes that swept across Ontario that day, including an equally strong one that hit Barrie.

The violent winds of the tornado uprooted giant trees, tossed around cars and shredded homes. The damage ranged from bent antennas to the complete destruction of residential homes.

The Grand Valley Star and Vidette reported that Amaranth Street was the hardest hit by the twister with the public library, municipal offices, and senior citizen home left in ruins.

The tornado resulted in the death of two individuals in Grand Valley, 76-year-old Matilda McIntyre and 50-year-old Barry Wood,

and left almost 70 people injured.