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Emergency Services buoyed Niagara County in state of emergency

After declaring the state of emergency over in Niagara County as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was hopeful that it would be a while before we had to make any similar declarations. Unfortunately, I was wrong.

The storms of July 20 had a significant impact across Niagara County. The torrential rainfall hit from Lewiston to Lockport and did significant damage to many areas below the escarpment. Niagara County Emergency Services Director Jonathan Schultz was keeping county leadership apprised of the situation and recommended we declare a state of emergency Tuesday evening.

We are very fortunate to have someone of Jonathan Schultz' caliber leading our Emergency Services Department and serving as fire coordinator. Essentially, Jon serves as our lead "first responder" coordinating with volunteer fire companies, the Sheriff's Office, the Health Department and others to meet the demands of any given situation.

Jon has been recognized by the

NIAGARA COUNTY LEGISLATURE



Becky Wydysh Chairwoman

International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) as being among the group of professionals who have maintained their Certified Emergency Manager designation. The CEM designation presently is held by only 2,000 men and women globally in the emergency management profession. The CEM designation is the highest honor of professional achievement available from the association, which represents professionals whose goals are saving lives and protecting property and the environment during emergencies and disasters.

But beyond Jon's credentials, it is the hard work and dedication of his entire team that really stand out. During the Lake Ontario floods of 2017 and 2019, our Emergency Services team was on the front lines with so many others coordinating our efforts, procuring sand bags and pumps and doing whatever else was needed to protect life and property.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Emergency Services was a key partner to the Niagara County Health Department. As Niagara County Public Health Director Dan Stapleton often said, Jon Schultz was his first call in the morning and his last phone call before bed each day.

Emergency Services took the

lead in procuring the necessary PPE for hospitals and nursing homes like masks and gowns. They conducted extensive COVID-19 testing, especially of first responders. They ran the very popular public events where they gave away hand sanitizer and masks. And they provided additional resources to the Health Department that included performing vaccinations.

Unfortunately, there always seems to be another emergency just around the corner, as was the case with the storm damage. Which brings us back to the state of emergency. There is often a little confusion about what that exactly means. A state of emergency is not a travel ban (although a travel ban can often be issued at the same time, as it was in this case.) Rather, it is a procedure that allows Jon and his team to more quickly take steps to address the situation. For example, that can mean accessing state resources, like equipment and personnel or being able to quickly procure necessary items outside regular purchasing guidelines.

We have already received numerous phone calls from residents and businesses about state emergency funding to help cover property damage. There are no such funds available at this time, but we are trying very hard to push the state

in that direction. That is why it is critical for anyone impacted by the storm to file a damage report so that Emergency Services can catalog the information.

Emergency Services has made that easy to do through a new smartphone application called Prepare Niagara. This app will serve as a new way for the agency to connect with Niagara County residents and visitors, providing information quickly and efficiently to anyone with a smartphone. Among those features is the ability to file a damage report. Other features include the ability to view evacuation procedures, view shelter location, receive push notification and browse emergency plans and checklists.

The Prepare Niagara app is available for download for free in the App Store and Google Play by searching "Niagara County Emergency, NY," or going to https://apps.myocv.com/share/a58414094. Residents call also call Emergency Services at 438-3171.

As a community, we cannot avoid many of these emergency situations, but we can do our best to be prepared. Thankfully, we have Jonathan Schultz and the Emergency Services team leading that effort.

Wheatfield supervisor's flooding response

BY DON MACSWAN Town of Wheatfield Supervisor

First, I would like to thank our first responders, town constables, and highway, water and sewer employees for their dedicated service during the severe flooding over a two-week period. Estimates of rainfall during this period were 9.5 to 11 inches. Our town engineers were also out monitoring water depth and flows during this storm.

On July 20, the north end of Wheatfield received an additional 4.06 inches of rain in less than two

hours, which exceeded a 500-year storm based on our department of commerce tables. This, of course, created a severe flooding issue in portions of the town. As the water moved south toward Sawyer Creek, more flooding appeared, bringing Sawyer Creek and the canal to its capacity and, in fact, at levels never seen before.

As a reminder, this was not a Wheatfield storm but a Niagara County storm event with rainfall totals never seen before in our county's history. Property dam-

age was severe in many locations throughout Niagara County. Many homes are still uninhabitable to this date.

Numerous roadways were flooded and some were washed out by the force of the water. Some areas of our county are still flooded.

The Town of Wheatfield is evaluating damage created by this storm and researching any alternatives that would benefit our residents if a storm should ever reoccur with such force.

A reminder to all of our residents:

Dumping grass clippings, branches and debris in our drainage ditches has the potential for blocking culverts and further restricting water flow. A large beach ball was removed from one of our drainage areas with the potential of blocking a culvert completely.

I also would like to extend my heartfelt understanding and empathy to those that suffered property damage and loss during this storm period.

Let's all hope for a dryer end to our summer. Stay safe and God bless.

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