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# Water, Water, Everywhere Remembering the Flood of 2008

by Mary Masonholder Wilson

Last Friday, June 14<sup>th</sup> marked the fifth-year anniversary of the 2008 flood in Columbus Junction. This past weekend the Columbus Fire Department held a meal complete with pictures and videos of the '08 flood and refreshed everyone's memories of this eventful week in the life of our small town. For many townspeople, though, this memory was unfortunately brought back this spring, when it was made known that Columbus Junction might indeed flood again. Some businesses in the flood plain moved out of their buildings; others put supplies and other items on higher shelves; and a few had moving crews lined up should the need arise for a fast "move out."

The city was also preparing this spring for a possible flood. They secured the use of the former CJ Lumber Building and grounds, thanks to Debbie Hills, had sand dumped there, and got a crew to start filling sandbags. An initial 5000 bags had been ordered in case of a flood and rolls of plastic to cover sand mounds were also in reserve. City workers shored up former levees and Jay Kemp dozed in a temporary levee on the fairgrounds side of the road.

Luckily it appears now that a repeat of 2008 will not occur this year. However, looking back at the town's response to this situation, five years ago is amazing.

When Mayor Dan Wilson was asked what his first memory of the flood of 2008 was, he responded without hesitation. "The tremendous number of volunteers that showed up to help in any way they could and how everyone worked together. The support of everyone in the community was tremendous, and EVERY single person played a crucial role; some even risked their lives."

Wilson's next response was, "I'm glad we had no more physical damage and no one was hurt. Very few homes were destroyed. With the amount of equipment and people and the speed with which we tried to build levees and fill sandbags, I'm amazed we did not have more injuries. We were not 100 percent successful in our attempt to stop the water from coming in to town, but we did minimize damage to our businesses and buildings and we delayed the amount of time that water was in our midst."

Following the flood, Columbus Junction was commended for many reasons, but one of them was this small town was one of the few

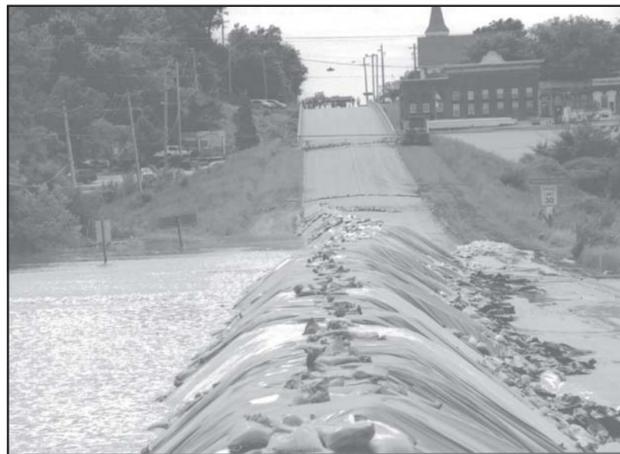
towns that did anything in advance to prepare for the flood. Mayor Wilson and Mark Huston, city council member, both commented on the fact that, "We had some time; we knew what was coming. Some towns did not take action; we did."

Todd Heck, Assistant Fire Chief for Columbus Junction who was acting as fire chief during the '08 flood since Lynn Mincer was out of town said, "Everybody came together. We had people standing in line to help. We had a lot of good local resources. For example Jay Kemp understood how to build stuff up and reinforce. We were able to reach out to a lot of the people who could find the answers for us." Heck went on to tell the story of when firemen were out on the river bridge by Tyson. Tyson had agreed to pipe in water to the city when people here in town had no water. Heck related they were stringing the hose across the railroad river bridge, water was all around them, and the fire whistle went off to indicate there was indeed a fire. "Heck commented, "It was a difficult situation, but we got organized and went."

Of course, the fire station was also command central until the water started rising and then the American Legion became the place for meeting, eating, and getting orders on what to do next. Both locations worked well and were great assets to the city in this time of emergency.

Julie Heindel, city clerk, and Fred Lukavsky of the public works department, both told how well city, county, and state officials worked together. Meetings were held twice a day to discuss strategies. Lukavsky commented, "Despite the flooding and having to limit water usage, our water was never contaminated; and with the help of Tyson, we soon had water again. He also complimented Gary Larson, who provided sand and a dozer and worked all day every day. Then there were other area farmers and businesses with equipment, too numerous to mention, who also helped out the city."

Heindel reiterated this thought by saying, "The surrounding towns were wonderful to us—Mediapolis, Wapello, Wayland, Washington, and others; also the state and other counties. Washington Wal Mart and area churches and organizations fed the workers—it was astonishing to see all the people who helped. Other memories for Heindel was getting the call from



Mayor Dan Wilson at 5:30 A.M. in the early morning of June 14<sup>th</sup> and he told her, "We need you now. Get here and pack your bag. We're in for a long haul." She knew then just how serious this situation was going to be. She even remembered that the city council meeting on Wednesday night of that week was held at the fire station so city officials could keep their eyes on the situation. Later, just after the council had had their meeting, a terrible thunderstorm with lots of rain started. It just brought more water to water.

Mark Huston remembers standing outside the fire station with Mayor Dan Wilson all night on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. "We were talking to folks in Des Moines who had the helicopters, etc., to help us."

One of the CJ flood pictures became "famous." It was a picture taken from the top of the viaduct on Sunday morning after the levee had broken the night before showing the flooded town and the silhouettes of two men walking back up the viaduct. The two men were Mark Huston and Fred Lukavsky. Fred was carrying something. What was it? Mark tells that while

he and Fred were looking down at the water, they saw a box of silverware floating by and Fred picked it up. Turns out the silver had been brought to the fire station by a Wayland Church to help feed workers, and had evidently been washed off the counter by the flooding waters. How ironic! This picture appeared in papers as far away as New York. (It can be seen in the Columbus Junction City Hall.)

Mark Huston summed up the situation by quoting Charles Dickens, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." The town came together in the most wonderful way to deal with the worst of circumstances.

Mayor Dan Wilson concluded with, "Due to all the efforts of '08, we have learned a lot. We're more prepared now. If such an event happens again—and we were close this year—Columbus Junction and its people will be ready."

(Note: The title is a paraphrase from the poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.)

## Remembering the Fire Department's Role during the Flood of 2008

On Saturday, June 14, 2008, the Columbus Junction Fire Department building was full of water. On Saturday, June 15, 2013, the CJ fire station was full of people reliving the flood of five years before. The stories were fast and furious as each person recalled his/her own personal part in the efforts to save the town from the muddy, brown river water.

Pictures were on display of the flood and related activities, and the high water mark is painted inside the fire station. Videos were playing showing all parts from the sandbagging; building levees; tying young men with ropes who went out into the swirling water to build wing dams; feeding the masses; the visit by Governor Culver, other politicians, and presidential candidate John McCain; meetings of city officials and police;

monitoring of water levels; a viaduct wedding; the train falling in the water near Tyson; and on and on it goes. Martha Harris and Mike Pavey supplied much of the video material and pictures.

A meal was served by the firemen as a fundraiser. Then fire chief, Lynn Mincer, presented fireman, Donnie Orr, with a certificate for his 20 years of service with the fire department. Dan Wilson, Mayor of CJ, also gave a speech thanking the fire department for all they do for the community, but especially for the services and leadership they provided in the flood of '08.

Throughout the evening, there was a raffle and drawing for pork loins. The winners were Anthony Lauber, Dalton Bright, Joan Gesling, Mary Wilson, Walt Freeman, and Jim Gabriel.

The flood was a massive project for a small town and the town rose to meet it—that was the theme of the evening. A town, its people, and its memories: no one can take those away.



Pictured is Donnie Orr receiving a plaque from Columbus Junction Fire Chief, Lynn Mincer for his twenty years of service to the Columbus Benefited Fire Department. Orr is also Columbus Junction's Police Chief. Submitted photo.

## Briefly -

### Community Club to meet

The Community Club will meet this Thursday at Noon at the Senior Center

### Legion Auxiliary to host blood drive

The Columbus Junction American Legion Ladies Auxiliary will host a community blood drive from 1:30 pm to 6:30 pm on Monday, June 24<sup>th</sup> in the American Legion Hall located at 99 Second Street, Columbus Junction. To donate, please contact Tammy Martin at 319-212-0160. Walk-ins welcome! Donor Eligibility Criteria: Potential donors must be at least 17 years of age (16 with parental permission form available through www.bloodcenter.org) and weigh more than 110 pounds. A photo I.D. or MVRBC Donor Card is required to donate. To schedule an appointment for donation, please call the Mississippi Valley Regional Blood Center at (800) 747-5401. Donors who last gave blood on or before 4/29/2013 are eligible to give blood at this drive.

### C.C.I.C. to meet

C.C.I.C. will meet at the Columbus City City Hall on June 25 at 5:30 and proceed to the Pizza Ranch in Washington for our meeting.

### Early Area Childhood Board to meet

The Early Childhood Iowa Area Board Des Moines/Louisa Counties will be meeting today, Wednesday, June 19, 2013, at 10:00 a.m. at the First United Presbyterian Church, 801 Middle St., Mediapolis, IA.

### Farmers' Market Coupons

Farmer's Market coupons are now available at the Senior Center on Thursdays from 10:15-11:00 A.M. until all supplies are exhausted.

### Historical Society Tractor Ride

The Louisa County Historical Society will host its third annual Tractor Ride on June 22nd, 2013. The group will leave Wapello at 9:00 am. Lunch along the way will be furnished with a meal and drawings for prizes at the conclusion of the ride. Call Mac McGill at 729-2281, Danny Gipple at 523-8278, or Dick McCormac at 728-8818 for details and registration forms.

### Letts Fest

The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Letts Fest will take place on Saturday, June 29, 2013. All proceeds will go to the Letts City Park. Events start at 8 a.m. with a breakfast at the Community Center and run until Midnight at the end of the street dance. Check Letts Fest our on Facebook for updates. For more information, contact Joy Murphy at 319-330-6063, Jake Shoppa at 563-571-4561, or Monica Bieri at 319-212-1613. The community is looking for vendors, and participants in the parade and car show. If interested, please contact Jake Shoppa at 563-571-4561; Monica Bieri at 319-212-1613; or Joy Murphy at 319-330-6063 and 319-726-3052.

### Fun Days at Letts United Methodist

Fun Days are being planned for students K-6 at the Letts United Methodist Church. The day will begin at 9 a.m. and end at 2. Lunch will be served. Activities, crafts, games, snacks, and music. Registration forms at the church office or call office in the a.m. M-F at 726-3641. Fun Days scheduled for June 20 and June 27 and August 1 and August 8. No fees. For questions, call Pastor Marsha Gerot at 319-725-6722.

### McGill/Kemp Reunion

The Annual McGill/Kemp Reunion will be held at 12:30 p.m. on Sunday, June 30<sup>th</sup>, at Academy Park in Grandview, Iowa. There will be a potluck lunch, a family picture taken, and an auction. Playground equipment is available for the children. All descendants of John Lee and Jesse Belle McGill, descendants of John's grandparents, William and Elizabeth McGill and descendants of Walter Kemp are welcome. For more information, contact Rondalyn K. Weyrick, 13685 105<sup>th</sup> Street, Wapello, IA 52653; Telephone 319-523-5252.

### Morning Sun 4th of July Quilt Show

The Morning Sun Methodist Church will again hold the annual 4th of July Quilt Show. All are invited to display quilts. Those wanting to display their quilts should bring them to the church on Wednesday, July 3 after 4:00. The Quilt Show will be held on the 4th from 9:00 until the parade. Admission is free. Participants should pick up their quilts after the parade. For more information, contact Bev Karagin at 868-7693.

### Parent Forum

ALL parents of Columbus Community School District students are invited to attend a PARENT FORUM on THURSDAY, JUNE 27 at 7:00 pm. in the High School student center. The purpose of the meeting is to generate positive ideas and solutions and to brainstorm ideas on how parents can help their students, how we can increase parent involvement in the school, and to learn what parents would like to see the school do to improve their student's educational experience. Parents will have the opportunity to work in small groups or individually and to share ideas directly with Dr. Johnson. Suggestions will be discussed and analyzed at SIAC (School Improvement Advisory Committee) meetings. A survey will also be available for parents to complete. Please plan to attend this very important meeting to support your student and your school.

### Blood Checks at Senior Center

Tami Nichols, R.N. from Colonial Manor will be at the Columbus Junction Senior Center on Wednesday, June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Come by and have your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol checked for free. We hope to see you there!

### Take 24 Summer Theater Program

A free theater program for students grades 4-12 will be happening this summer every Monday and Thursday from 9:30-11:30 a.m. at the Columbus Community High School Auditorium. High school students can earn silver cord hours. If you are interested or want more information, please contact Ashley Stagner at take24theater@live.com.

A Special Thank You to all of the volunteers who came forward during the Flood of 2008. And also a special thanks goes out to all of the volunteers who helped in the work of sandbagging in building up the levee these past weeks.

