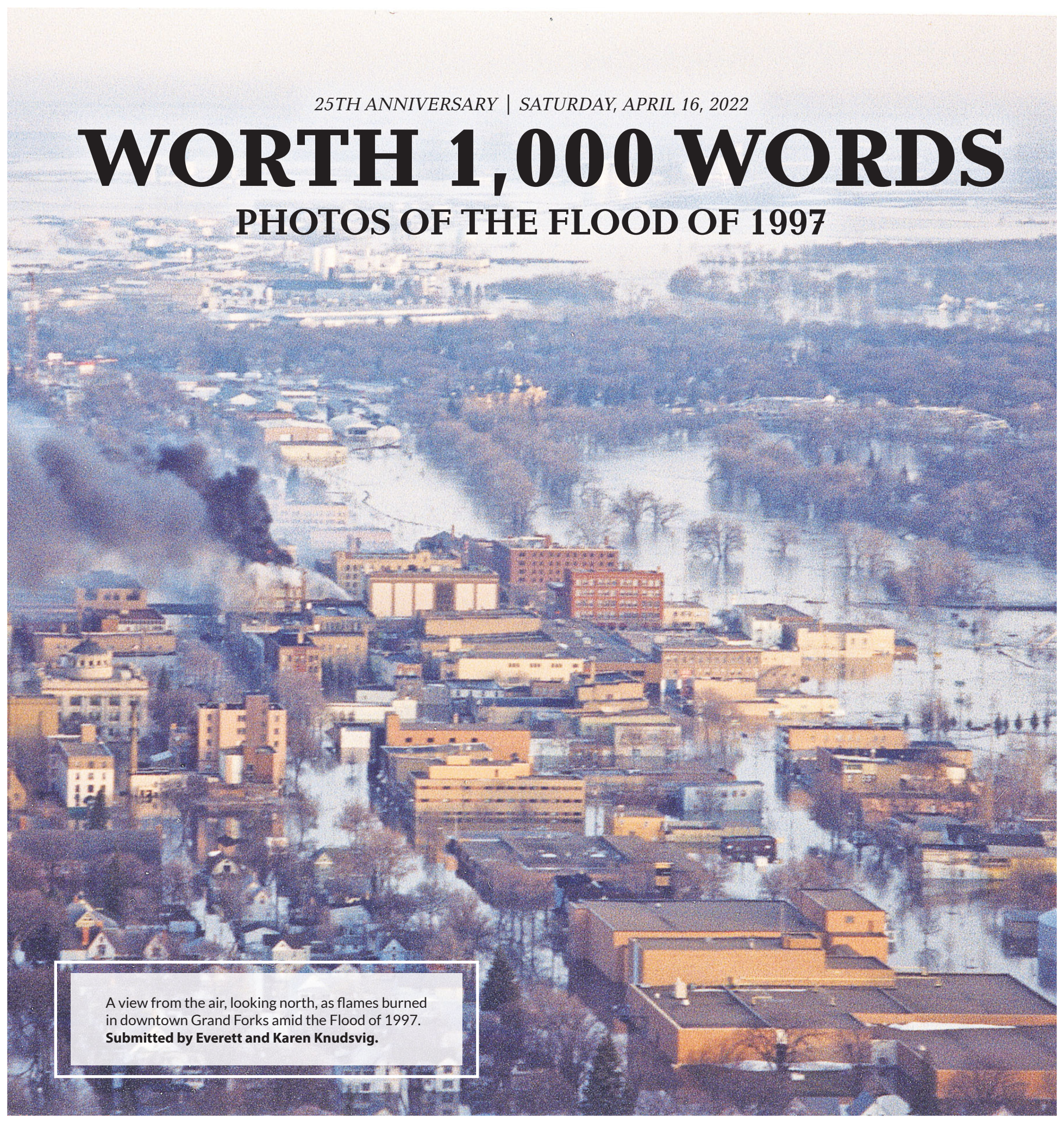


25TH ANNIVERSARY | SATURDAY, APRIL 16, 2022

WORTH 1,000 WORDS

PHOTOS OF THE FLOOD OF 1997


An aerial photograph of downtown Grand Forks, North Dakota, during the 1997 flood. The city is densely packed with multi-story brick and concrete buildings. A large, dark plume of smoke or steam rises from the left side of the frame, partially obscuring some buildings. The surrounding landscape is a mix of trees and open areas, some of which appear to be covered in snow or ice. The overall scene is one of a city under duress during a major natural disaster.

A view from the air, looking north, as flames burned in downtown Grand Forks amid the Flood of 1997.

Submitted by Everett and Karen Knudsvig.



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Reader photos help further tell the story of Flood of 1997

HERALD STAFF

A month ago, the Grand Forks Herald reached out to its readers, asking them to submit photos from the Flood of 1997. Why?

Because we felt our own photos – which so capably and dramatically depict that devastating time 25 years ago this weekend – have been seen so many times that they perhaps have lost some of their original impact.

What, then, could we do to help further tell the story during this milestone anniversary?

“The work of Herald photographers – people like Eric Hylden, Jackie Lorentz, John Stennes and Chuck Kimmerle – during the flood was incredible,” said Herald Publisher Korrie Wenzel, who joined the Herald in 2014, years after the flood. “The Herald’s photo archives of the flood will always be a standard for portraying the pain, suffering and camaraderie that can only come during a catastrophe. But the photos that have come in from our readers now also help tell that story, and from a new angle.”

In this section, the Herald is publishing a sample of the photos that arrived in recent weeks. These two dozen photos are only a fraction, however, of the overall number of photos that were sent to us. The remainder can be viewed on the Herald’s website, at grandforksherald.com.

Also on the website are a handful of videos – part of our “Worth 1,000 words” series – in which some of the readers who submitted photos tell us, in their own words, about their memories of the flood.

“Thank you to all who helped with this project,” Wenzel said. “We’re proud to add these photos to the historical archive of a monumental time in Greater Grand Forks’ history.”



Looking south at the intersection of Grand Forks' DeMers Avenue and South Washington Street during the Flood of 1997.

Submitted by Toni Nicolson.



1951
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1997
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2014
RJZ serves as prime contractor on the Roseau River Reach 1 Project, consisting of approximately 6,500 linear feet of diversion channel and 7,000 linear feet of recreation trails

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1966
Robert J. Zavoral helps direct the first major flood fighting activities in the Red River Valley



2004
RJZ is awarded the Superior Safety Performance Award for the Hartsville Coulee Diversion project



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Reader photos help tell stories of Flood of 1997

All told, more than 150 photos of the event were brought to the Herald in recent weeks, capturing heart-wrenching scenes and reflecting the enormity of the tragedy

BY PAMELA KNUDSON

Grand Forks Herald

GRAND FORKS – As she sifts through pictures from the Flood of 1997, Marcia Wahlstrand still can't believe the devastation wrought by the natural disaster that overtook Grand Forks 25 years ago.

"It's kind of hard to talk about what we went through," Wahlstrand said. "We felt so devastated that it all had happened. It was like a dream."

Among her most vivid memories of the Flood of '97 is the evening the dike broke. She and her husband, Scott, were with hundreds of others who had worked almost around the clock for weeks to contain the rising Red River.

"That evening, the National Guard got up on the dikes (in the Riverside Park area) and said everyone had to leave because the dike was breaching," Wahlstrand recalled. "It sticks so strongly with me because I had never seen so many men cry; I saw tears on their faces as they dragged their shovels. We felt so defeated. ... I knew what it must have meant to them."

Wahlstrand is among about two dozen area residents who answered a Herald request to provide pictures to commemorate the anniversary of the nation's largest mass evacuation of a city since the Civil War, an event that came after the Red River broke through walls of sandbags and flooded most of Grand Forks and East Grand Forks. It happened 25 years ago this weekend.

PHOTOS: Page 7

TOP PHOTO: The first- and flood-damaged First National Bank building is shown in this photo from the Flood of 1997.

Submitted by Diane Helgeson.

MIDDLE PHOTO: A photo of high water in a neighborhood during the Flood of 1997. **Submitted by Joe and Fran Adams.**

BOTTOM PHOTO: Belmont Road in Grand Forks during the Flood of 1997. **Submitted by Todd Benedict.**





This photo of the Flood of 1997 was submitted by Tim Lykken. He wrote: "Being a city employee in 1997 I was assigned my own surcharged manhole lid to keep down."

Submitted by Todd Barsness.

Mary Barsness looks over clothes that were laid out on a lawn following the Greater Grand Forks Flood of 1997.

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Fire crews work to extinguish flames of the First National Bank building in downtown Grand Forks during the Flood of 1997. Note that the truck has been loaded onto a National Guard flatbed, since the floodwaters were too high to be navigated by most vehicles.
Submitted by Roger Stadstad.



A home damaged by the Flood of 1997 is shown with an inspiring message that says "I will succeed in life in general with self confidence, faith and with the help of God almighty." **Submitted by Alyce-Mae Christianson.**

PHOTOS

From Page 4

All told, more than 150 photos of the event were brought to the Herald in recent weeks, capturing heart-wrenching scenes and reflecting the enormity of the tragedy.

Although the Herald has a vast collection of its own photos of the Flood of 1997, the readers who submitted photos for this project now help tell a more intimate story of the impact of the historic flood.

Two dozen of the photos are featured in the Herald's special section commemorating the event, while more than 100 are being published online at grandforksherald.com.

For weeks, in April 1997, exhaustion had run bone-deep as many people who fought the floodwaters late into the night had to get up in the morning and go to work, Wahlstrand said.

Evacuating from the city in April '97, Wahlstrand and her family went to stay at her brother's home near Fargo.

"There were 19 of us there. We would stay up way into the evening to watch TV (coverage of the flood)," she said.

Like many in this area, she lost irreplaceable family photos, as well as her wedding gown and wedding album, she said. "We lost the kids' baby books. They were gone."

She attempted to wipe the water off photos that were salvaged. In one of them, "I wiped my husband's grandmother's face off, and we didn't have another," she said. "I learned later that I wouldn't have had to do that."

Among the photos Wahlstrand loaned to the Herald is one that shows a camper, jutting through the wall of a

PHOTOS: Page 8



Submitted by Roxanne and Ernie Korynta.

A photo of Ernie Korynta, inside the bedroom of the house and after the Flood of 1997.



Submitted by Tim Ness.

A rather obvious indicator of the depth of floodwater is lodged in a garage in this photo taken after the Flood of 1997.

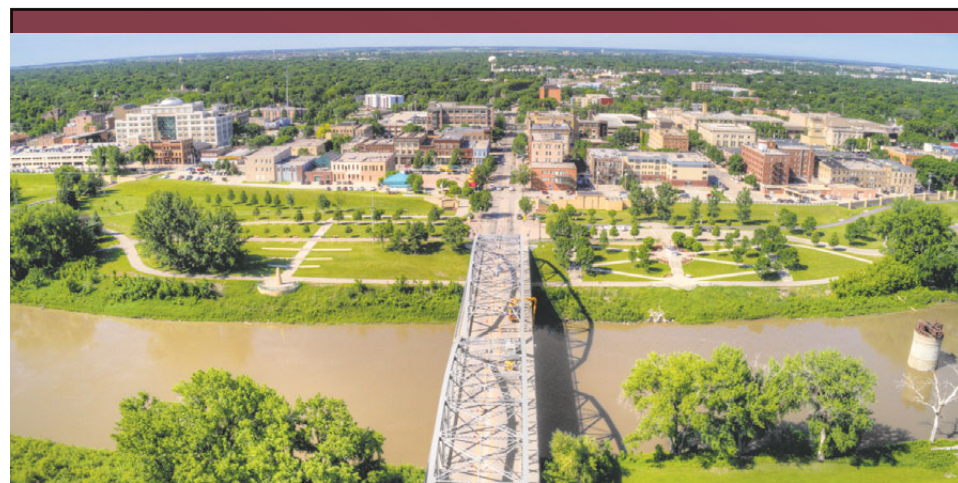


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PHOTOS

From Page 7

house. Another shows a home ripped from its foundation.

In the aftermath of the flood, when Wahlstrand and her friend Janice Waletzko, a fellow teacher at Grand Forks Air Force Base, visited the base, "it was heartwarming to see that our school had been turned into a nursing home," she said. "We felt comfortable that it was a respite for those who really needed it."

Waletzko's own home on Lincoln Drive, where she had lived for 17 years, was inundated with water that reached about 3 feet from the ceiling on the main floor, she said. She and her husband, Jerry, returned to find the floor had buckled, the foundation had cracks in it – and, oddly enough, "a piano was resting on a goblet," she said

"The house was condemned, so no workers could come in the house to help me," Janice Waletzko said. "It was real hard."

Waletzko's photos from that time show mud and grime caked on most everything, and sheer devastation inside a home.

The Wahlstrands' family members and others, including parents of her students, came to help clean out their home. With awe and gratitude in her voice, Marcia Wahlstrand recalled the untold number of strangers who came, from all over the country, to help flood victims here.

"Everyone wanted to help; kids were helping out," she said. "I think of all that the Red Cross did for us, and the Salvation Army. I still think of the cans of water we drank from."

Submitted by Renae Bye.

PHOTOS: Page 10



High piles of snow are shown in this photo, taken before the Flood of 1997.

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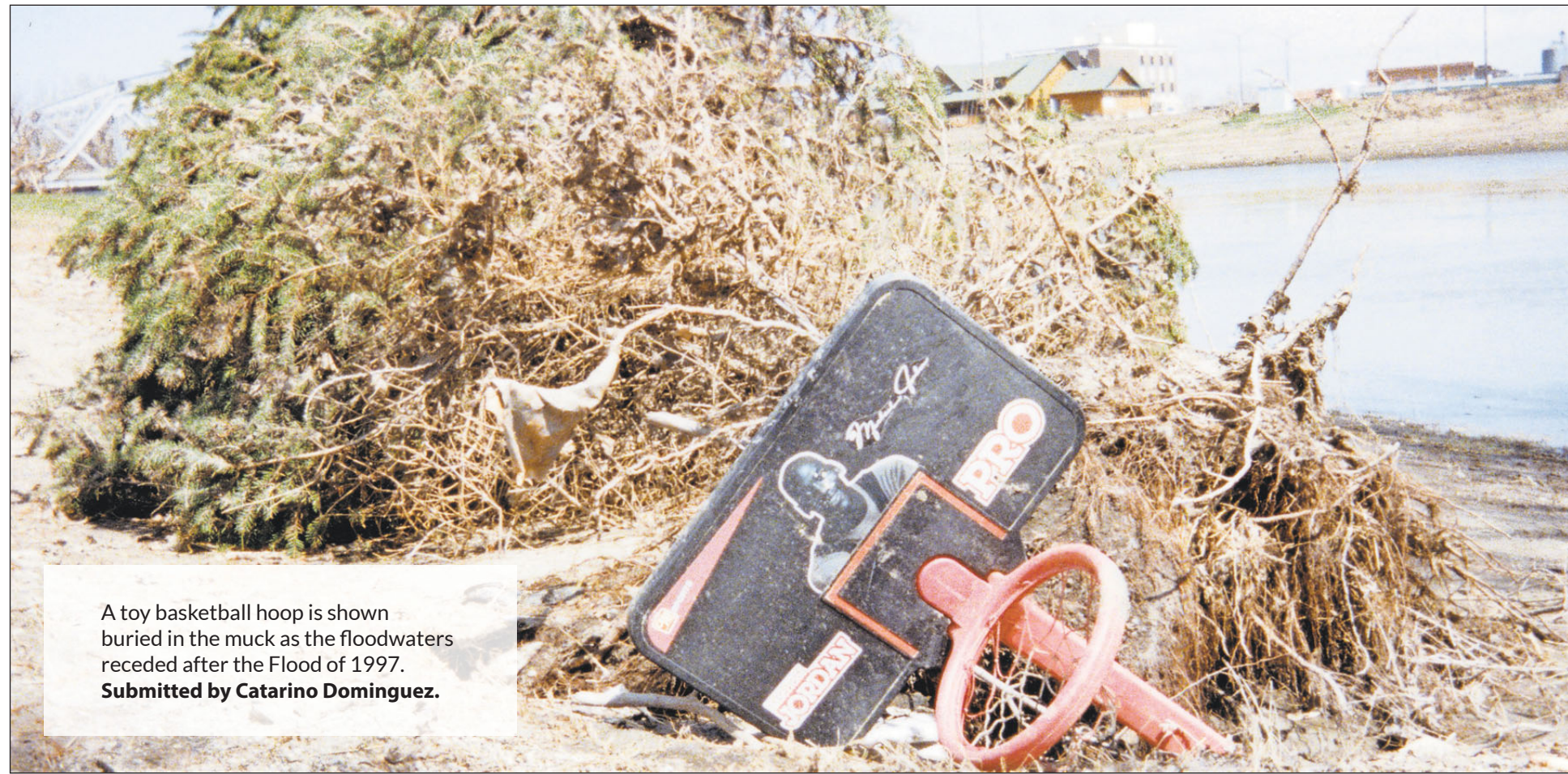
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A toy basketball hoop is shown buried in the muck as the floodwaters receded after the Flood of 1997.
Submitted by Catarino Dominguez.

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...and the triumphs.



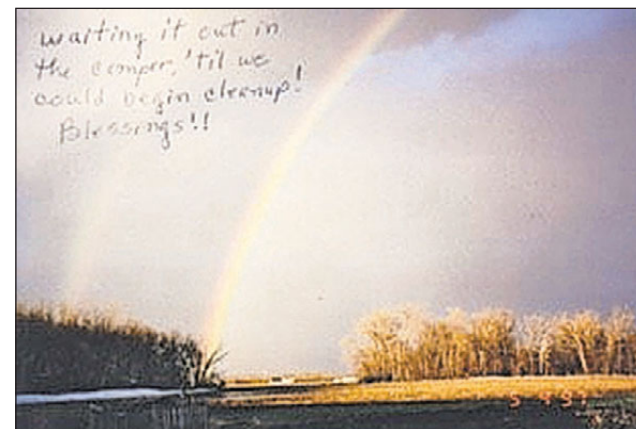
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Submitted by Larry Skroch.

A team works to add sandbags to a growing dike during the Flood of 1997 in Greater Grand Forks.



Submitted by Elsie Egstad.

This photo of a rainbow comes from Elsie Egstad. On the photo is written "Waiting it out in the camper 'til we could begin cleanup! Blessings!"

PHOTOS

From Page 8

Permeating the community was a sense that everyone was in the same boat. "There was such a feeling of unity in the community," she said.

That shared feeling, in the face of sadness and destruction, was brought to life in the Grand Forks Public Schools stage production "The Big Bad Flood," which drew thousands to numerous performances.

PHOTOS: Page 13

FROM FLOOD TO FUTURE

We're proud to have served alongside the staff at the City of Grand Forks through the Flood of '97. We've worked diligently together to ensure safe, quality drinking water for our community - for many years to come.



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My Flood Story

I had just opened ChiroCenter One the year before the flood in our downtown location. Although going through the flood and closure of my young business was super difficult and so scary at the time, so many people lost so much more. They lost everything.

After the flood, I remember the support the nation had for Grand Forks. That was amazing.

I also remember the support the residents of Grand Forks and the surrounding area had

for each other. That was truly incredible.

I had the very first patient ever in my clinic walk in after I had reopened and write me a check to keep as a credit on his account to make sure I had enough money to get by and didn't have to close the doors. I was floored, and so appreciative. And as we all found out in the coming months, there were stories of this unbridled generosity everywhere.

I am proud to say that I still see this family today. As well as their children, and now their grandchildren.

It is certainly something I will

never forget, and something I still think about often and every time I see a member of this family. We are all so lucky to live in a place where the people still care about their community and one another.

I am also so thankful for the support and referrals of all my patients over the past 26 years I've been in practice. I certainly would not be here without all your support...and I thank each and every one of you for your trust and confidence.

Yours in good health,
Dr. Brian V. Jongeward

To hear more of my flood story please visit the ChiroCenter One Facebook page at www.facebook.com/chirocenterone

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VISION STATEMENT

The Red and Red Lake Rivers Greenway will protect residents of Grand Forks and East Grand Forks from flooding, provide opportunities for economic growth, improve and restore ecological stability of the river corridor, link residents and tourists to four seasons of recreation and transportation facilities, provide linkage between the cities, preserve and promote the history and culture of the region through education, and improve the quality of life for future generations.

•Written by workshop participants (residents of Grand Forks, ND and East Grand Forks, MN) and prepared by Greenways, Inc. and the US Army Corps of Engineers as part of the Greenway Plan of September 2001



1 | A path to a garage has been made between piles of refuse, stacked up in the wake of the Flood of 1997. **Submitted by John Sanderson.**

2 | Steve (left) and Gordon Bondy spend time cleaning up in a local yard in the wake of the Flood of 1997. **Submitted by Pauline Bondy.**

3 | This was a common scene throughout Greater Grand Forks after the waters receded following the Flood of 1997. **Submitted by Janice Waletzko.**

4 | This photo shows some of the secondary damage wrought by the Flood of 1997 -- in this case, a camper that rammed into the side of a home. **Submitted by Marcia Wahlstrand.**

Evacuees bide their time at Grand Forks Air Force Base during the Flood of 1997. **Submitted by Pat Moore.**

PHOTOS

From Page 10

The play was riddled with humor, a healing salve in a time of grief, that everyone whose lives had been upended and whose homes had been damaged or destroyed could relate to.

"That was a big culmination," Wahlstrand said.

Numerous photos that came to the Herald showed property owners and volunteers working together to clear debris after the floodwaters subsided.

Roger Stadstad, who was working full-time with the North Dakota Army National Guard, recalled the eerie silence that hung over downtown after floodwaters overtook the city.

"I remember how quiet it was downtown," he said. "Like it was dead. There was nothing going on."

Because of his role with the National Guard, Stadstad, of rural Manvel, North Dakota, had access to locations "where no one else could go," so he witnessed things that most others did not, he said.

He saw a wave of river water coming down the street when the dikes failed, he said.

The area inside the Third Street Mall, an enclosed, pedestrian-only mall fronting DeMers Avenue, was an unbelievable mess, Stadstad said. All sorts of items "were floating in the water."

The National Guard's most important task was to get people out of their homes and transported to Grand Forks Air Force Base, which became the first, safe refuge for many whose homes and neighborhoods were

threatened by flood waters.

Photos that Stadstad loaned to the Herald show efforts by the National Guard and local fire crews to combat the flood and the fire that devastated downtown buildings as the waters rose.

Air base as medical outpost

When it was decided that the hospital would have to close, Dr. Pat Moore and his colleagues worked in the emergency room to determine where the patients would go.

"Fortunately, there were ambulances from many cities" that transported patients to other facilities," he said, "and National Guard helicopters took them to different areas."

A photo that Moore brought to the Herald shows a

PHOTOS: Page 14



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This photo is of Ben and Bev Clayburgh, among the wreckage of the Flood of 1997. Submitted by Vicki Fredrikson.



PHOTOS

From Page 13

military helicopter low on the horizon near the hospital.

Grand Forks Air Force Base also served as a vital location to provide care for patients and others displaced by the flood.

The air base hangar, outfitted with cots, was a shelter “for people who didn’t have a place to go,” said Moore, a family physician. Among Moore’s photos is one of that scene, showing dozens of cots closely placed together as evacuees milled about.

“It was a little strange, because I actually ended up practicing in the very same office where I practiced when I was stationed at the air base,” he said.

After they left their home on Terrace Drive, Pat and his wife, RoxAnne, lived in their RV that they parked at a campground near Larimore, North Dakota, for about a month. Employees there “were extremely helpful,” supplying the space at no charge, filling campers’ propane tanks and emptying waste containers, Pat said. “They were just unreal. The people of Larimore were so great, too.”

Returning to their home, the Moores found water in the lower levels that came “within a foot of the upstairs,” RoxAnne said. “We lived in half a house for a long time.”

“It was amazing to me the damage that flood waters did,” she said. Appliances, including a washing machine and freezer, “had traveled down the hallway into totally another room.”

‘Like a war zone’

When the dikes broke in Grand Forks, Everett and Karen Knudsvig first evacuated to a relative’s farm near

Buxton, North Dakota, and later to their daughter’s home in Wisconsin.

When they returned to Grand Forks weeks later, “it felt like a war zone,” Karen said. “It wasn’t a nice feeling.”

A photo from the air, loaned to the Herald by the Knudsvigs, shows smoke rising from burning downtown buildings and water literally everywhere the eye can see.

She and her husband saw “piles of refrigerators, stoves, washers and dryers” as they drove around the city’s northwest side, she said. “That got me; that was a hard thing to see.”

At their home on Olson Drive, they found “a lot of water in the basement, but it didn’t touch the ceiling,” she said.

The sounds of sirens that had warned people to evacuate their homes also made a lasting impression.

“Every time I hear sirens now, that still comes back,” Karen said.

Strange scenes

Catarino “Ken” Dominguz was living in a basement apartment, in an older house on South Third Street, when the flood hit.

When he returned to his apartment, after evacuation, he found “grass and leaves on the ceiling,” he said. “A chest of drawers had disintegrated, and a large tube TV was lying face down. Everything I touched just fell apart.”

The house, near Minnesota Street, was demolished, he said.

Renae Bye, who lived in the 600 block of Ninth Avenue South at the time of the flood, said the day the dikes broke, “overland water came in a gigantic crest – eight inches of water covered Lincoln Drive.”

After the flood, the scene at their house “was terrible, eerie, quiet, hardly anyone around, no power or noise,”

Bye said. “It was our home but everything was strange and odd. It was just eerie.”

Memory of the sounds that were so prevalent then “is what stands out to me the most,” she said.

For months after floodwaters receded, “we would hear (machinery) up and down the streets hauling washers and dryers, or food trucks coming.”

In the days leading up to the flood, Bye remembered, “The kids were helping make sandwiches and sandbagging and clearing debris from the street drains. We just kept busy, not knowing that we’d be evacuated,” she said. The night that happened, “we grabbed everything we thought we’d need for a few days and we left town.” They had no idea they’d be gone for five weeks.

At her parents’ home in Minto, North Dakota, on TV, “we watched my husband’s place of employment, First National Bank, burning down,” she said. Later, Alan Bye was assigned to another location in Fargo.

When Bye and her family could return to their home, they found water up to the rafters in the basement – a bin of Legos was floating in the water, it had never tipped over. Debris was all over the yard.

She recalled having to heat water on the stove “and carry it to a bathtub upstairs for baths until we could get a water heater put in. It was a big inconvenience, but at least we were in our own home, and we went from there to make it liveable.”

The weeks after returning home “were the strangest times of our lives,” Bye said. “Unless you lived there and went through the experience, it was impossible to describe to anyone what it was really like.”

And yet there was hope. A photo submitted to the Herald by Elsie Egstad shows a rainbow in the distance. On the photo is written “Waiting it out in the camper ‘til we could begin cleanup! Blessings!”



5



6



7




8

5 | Vehicles traverse a flooded street in East Grand Forks in the wake of Flood of 1997. **Submitted by Bruce Otteson.**

6 | A wall of sandbags, before it was topped by water during the Flood of 1997. **Submitted by Eunice and Peter Kuhn.**

7 | Volunteers who helped clean out a house on Fifth Avenue North during the Flood of 1997. Among them are out-of-state volunteers who endured Hurricane Hugo in 1989. **Submitted by Truman Bratteli.**

8 | A photo of a home wrecked by the Flood of 1997. The photo's owner, Brenda Halle, simply titled the photo "Our upstairs." **Submitted by Brenda Halle.**



The Grand Forks County Historical society grounds and buildings are available to tour from May 15 to September 15.

Tours are conducted daily from 1-5pm, other times by appointment.

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