

# Suffolk NEWS-HERALD



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AUGUST 5, 2020

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## 'Everything else can be replaced'



### Residents grateful after likely tornado damaged homes but took no lives

BY TRACY AGNEW  
EDITOR

Suffolk residents started picking up the pieces on Tuesday morning after Hurricane Isaias left destruction in its wake, likely spawning at least one or two tornadoes near

downtown.

Meredith Stielow and her fiancé, Bryce Monteyro, bought their Riverview house on Western Avenue in January and have already canceled their wedding once due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They are supposed to get married next

Saturday.

"We had fallen asleep on the couch," Stielow said. "He heard the tornado warning, so he got up and looked out the window and it was really quiet — and then he heard a

See **TORNADO**, 3

TRACY AGNEW/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD  
Mary Davies points out where the tree came from that caused heavy damage to her Riverview home during a likely tornado spawned early Tuesday by Tropical Storm Isaias.

## Widespread damage, power outages

BY JIMMY LAROUÉ  
STAFF WRITER

3:06 a.m.

Michelle Pierce said that time will be stuck in her head for a long time, after strong winds from an apparent tornado in the early morning hours of Tuesday morning knocked down a large tree in front of the house next door to hers on Cedar Street downtown.

Pierce, who has lived in her three-story at 202 Cedar St. for more than 15 years, said at one

point during the storm, she had gone outside during a lull in Tropical Storm Isaias, and a neighbor had admonished her to go back into her house.

She saw trees along her street bending over toward the homes on her side of the street, and then when inside as the tornado was overhead, the doors inside her home were opening and closing, and the home itself was shaking.

"I keep getting goosebumps because I'm still shook," Pierce said as she stood outside her home late Tuesday morning, her

11-year-old son and 16-year-old daughter finally asleep after being awake during the overnight hours. "It got quiet and we just hear this noise, whoooooosh."

She and her son jumped up and were yelling out that there was a tornado, and all of her windows were rattling.

"You could feel it," Pierce said, as she began to stomp to demonstrate. "What in the world? The whole house, you could feel it."

Her thoughts at the time? "What are we going to do? We've got nowhere to go," Pierce

said. "It's crazy. We were just so scared, and then it just stopped."

The city reported two possible tornadoes touched down during the early morning hours Tuesday in the downtown and King's Fork areas of Suffolk as part of Tropical Storm Isaias, with strong winds knocking down trees and power lines, while damaging numerous homes and businesses.

The city reported damage in the area from White Marsh Road to the King's Fork area, with the Riverview and Hall Place

neighborhoods taking the brunt of one, while areas of downtown on Cedar Street near Peanut Park, as well as areas of downtown along South Saratoga and West Washington streets, also sustained heavy damage from downed trees and strong winds.

As of mid-morning Tuesday, Dominion Energy reported 21,000 outages in Suffolk, which is about 83% of its customers in the city.

By about 3 p.m. Tuesday, there

See **DAMAGE**, 3

# Damage: Shelter closed after nobody showed up

Continued from page 1

were 15,570 Dominion customers in the city without power, with more than 180,000 people without power among its customers in southeastern Virginia as of mid-afternoon Tuesday. With more than 500,000 Dominion customers in Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina who had lost power through midday Tuesday, it said it would be at least several days before power was fully restored, especially in North Carolina, Hampton Roads, the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula. Community Electric Cooperative had reported about 2,200 people without power, or about 67% of its city customers, as of mid-morning Tuesday.

The city was also reporting multiple roads with downed trees and power lines, including Turlington Road, Bennetts Pasture

Road, U.S. Route 58 eastbound at Wilroy Road, a part of Route 58 westbound, the 4700 block of Whaleyville Boulevard and the 5500 block of Godwin Boulevard. City Public Works crews are working in those affected areas, and city officials ask that residents stay off of affected roadways and out of damaged neighborhoods, as damage assessments are ongoing.

Heavy damage could be seen to buildings along South Saratoga and West Washington streets, including the Brandon House, which sustained significant damage to its windows and roof. The rear of the building at 101 S. Saratoga St. was blown out, and there was also damage to the front, rear and roof of the nearby Suffolk News-Herald building. Windows to cars parked beside the building

were damaged, mostly on their right side.

The city asked residents to use "extreme caution" when performing damage assessments in the aftermath of the storm. With the sun coming out, many residents ventured downtown to get a closeup view of the damage.

Donald and Nicole Perkins, who live next to the News-Herald building at 132 W. Washington St., said they heard the apparent tornado come through around 3:13 a.m. They said they had three canopies that were destroyed, but their residence did not sustain damage.

"I heard the alerts go off on our phone and I got a call from another tenant here, a friend of ours, stating the same thing, and at that time, things (were) blowing around," said Donald Perkins. "I looked outside and it was just a

downpour."

He said they received two different alerts on their phones for a tornado warning, waking them up, and then they heard what sounded like a tornado come through.

"It was very loud, yeah," Donald Perkins said. "Even just this morning coming out after it had all passed, just opening the door my dog went crazy just hearing the wind outside."

The city said damage assessment teams would be out throughout the day Tuesday, focusing on private property damage. Residents are asked to call the Emergency Operations Center at 514-4570 to report any damage to private property. It was taking calls through 5 p.m. Tuesday, and advised that people could also call Wednesday, beginning at 8:30 a.m.

Several city streets will also remain closed indefinitely, including West Washington Street at Main Street to Pine Street, as well as South Saratoga Street at West Washington Street to Smith Street. Detour signs are being placed in those areas. While sidewalks in several areas are also closed, businesses that were not directly affected remain open.

Cedar Hill Cemetery closed Tuesday and was to remain closed Wednesday so several large, downed trees could be removed.

The city had opened an emergency shelter at King's Fork High School early morning Tuesday, but by 1 p.m., it had closed, as no residents came to the shelter or needed assistance there, city officials reported. The Emergency Operations Center at Suffolk Fire and

Rescue Station 6 was to transition to virtual operations at 5 p.m. Tuesday.

The National Weather Service's Wakefield office will be out at several areas of Western Tidewater and northeastern North Carolina to investigate possible tornadoes, according to meteorologist Mike Montefusco. He said there was also significant damage in the Gates and Bertie county areas of northeastern North Carolina, as well as parts of Western Tidewater and into Gloucester and Mathews counties on the Middle Peninsula reporting scattered wind damage.

"At this point we have not conducted those surveys just yet, so those tornado surveys will actually be ongoing, hopefully this evening through the next couple of days," Montefusco said.

# Tornado: National Weather Service will assess damage

Continued from page 1

loud whistling noise."

Stielow said he woke her up and rushed her to the hall bathroom, where they began screaming for their roommate. He started coming down the stairs just when the tree fell into his bedroom.

Stielow called her mom and stepdad, who live just down the street, and they came to pick them up while the storm still raged. Stielow and Monteyro took their two dogs, two cats and their birth certificates with them.

"Everything else can be replaced," she said. Later in the day, family members were helping rescue bridesmaids dresses for their upcoming wedding as well as other necessities

and mementos.

Just around the corner, Mary Davies and her husband, Tom, suffered heavy damage to their home, and he got a gash to the face.

"The alerts woke us up, and I was Facetiming with my son when we heard it," she said. "The tree came in the back, opened up the back, and that's where the wind was coming from, so it threw him across the room," she said.

A sizeable contingent of family and friends showed up to the Davieses' home to help them salvage clothes and move furniture to a part of the house where it wouldn't get wet, while Tom Davies was at the hospital getting stitches.

Mary Davies said she

was grateful she and her husband were OK.

"That's the most important thing," she said.

Residents on Culloden Street were among the first to bear the brunt of the likely tornado.

"It sounded like a train," said Gene A. Jones. "I came to the door and looked, laid back down and that was when I heard the cracking noise."

The storm passed through the Hall Place neighborhood south of downtown, where numerous trees were uprooted. Neighbors Zoe Meece and Arenia Rice described what it sounded like as they surveyed the damage.

"It was a giant lightning," Meece said, pointing to her

other neighbor's tree on the ground. "It hit his tree. I could hear it come down at the same time as this giant roar, like a freight train. Then I just started hearing ... transformers blowing."

"I heard the same thing," Rice said. "A woosh, and then I saw a flash of something, that was about it. It was really fast. After a while, when it got quiet, we all came outside."

The storm apparently moved on to the downtown business district after it was done with Hall Place. The Suffolk News-Herald building sustained heavy damage, as did Knight Finance and Brandon House furniture nearby. The storm also damaged Suffolk Fire & Rescue

Station 1 before it arrived in Riverview.

More Riverview residents like Stielow and Davies described taking shelter during the storm.

Taylor Johnson said he, his wife, their 2-year-old daughter and the dogs went to the basement when they got the alarm. He remembers it being around 3:20 a.m.

"I went back upstairs to grab the dogs, and when I did I looked out the window and saw the blue lights from the power lines arcing," he said. "And then I heard this really loud, low rumble and I'm like, 'OK, yeah, we definitely need to get down to the basement and get secure.'"

Stephen Rhodes had lots

of trees down around his home but little damage to the house itself. He said he and his wife went downstairs when they got the tornado warning alert. He was sitting on the back porch, and his wife was inside with the two dogs.

"Suddenly, I don't know how to describe it, you could just tell something was coming," he said. "I hopped inside, slammed the door, the power went out and it was over in what felt like three seconds, just that quick."

Rhodes was working on freeing his vehicle from the bundle of downed trees and branches.

"We're fortunate," he said. "We've just got a mess."

# Suffolk NEWS-HERALD



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## Storm cleanup continues



### City bruised by tornadoes, but grateful

BY JIMMY LAROUÉ  
STAFF WRITER

Margaret Babb earned the purple bruise she got on her arm, courtesy of the EF-1 tornado that snapped a large tree in her neighbor's yard and landed partly on their roof as

well as hers. More than 24 hours after the tornado twisted above their downtown Cedar Street home, both she and her husband, Johnnie Babb, said they're blessed to be alive. But they had opposite reactions to their experience.

"It didn't ever scare me," Johnnie Babb said. "I was scared," she said. "I kept calling him. And he said, 'Get down on the floor. Get down on the floor.' By the time we got down on the floor,



JIMMY LAROUÉ/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD  
Johnnie and Margaret Babb said they are thankful to be alive after a tree landed on their Cedar Street house during an EF1 tornado that touched down just after 3 a.m. Aug. 4.

See CLEANUP, 8



TRACY AGNEW/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

Utility workers hang an orange flag on power lines in Riverview on Thursday, signaling one of the first steps in power restoration there. The orange flag means the operations center has been informed not to restore power to this neighborhood while personnel are working.

### 'This is our Super Bowl'

BY TRACY AGNEW  
EDITOR

"This is our Super Bowl," said Andrew Molinares. "It's our time to shine."

Molinares, an operations/construction supervisor for Dominion Energy, spoke Thursday morning standing on a street in the Riverview neighborhood of Suffolk. He was surrounded by a neighborhood that suffered heavy damage from an EF1 tornado early Tuesday, spawned by Tropical Storm Isaias. Also crowding neighborhood streets were personnel and equipment from multiple electric utilities, tree companies and more, who coalesced in Riverview on Thursday to start the process of clearing the remaining trees needed to access equipment and repairing 25 broken poles and seven transformers.

Workers from as close by

as Northern Virginia and as far away as Oklahoma have been in the Hampton Roads area since late Tuesday and early Wednesday working to restore power.

In all, more than half a million Dominion customers in Virginia and North Carolina lost power thanks to Isaias. By the number of customers out of power, this was the 10th-worst storm in Dominion's history, the company has said.

Molinares is from the Fairfax County area and has worked for Dominion since 20. He has responded to multiple storms outside of his own area, leaving his wife and son with only a few hours' notice, as he did this Tuesday after Isaias.

"It sucks," he said. "I don't know any better way to put it. But they're understanding.

See SUPER BOWL, 14

## Board opts for virtual start to school year

BY JIMMY LAROUÉ  
STAFF WRITER

Students in Suffolk Public Schools will begin the upcoming school year virtually for the first nine weeks following a unanimous vote of the School Board Thursday.

The board did, however, amend part of the plan put forth by Superintendent Dr. John B. Gordon III and other administrators to allow teachers to come into school just two days per week, rather than the four that was originally proposed.

It also decided to phase in bringing in special needs students with severe disabilities, rather than bringing them in four days per week to start the school year.

See VIRTUAL, 6

## COVID-19 testing scheduled

BY JIMMY LAROUÉ  
STAFF WRITER

The Western Tidewater Health District will be holding free COVID-19 testing in Smithfield, Franklin and Suffolk in August.

The testing began Aug. 7 at Sentara BelleHarbour in North Suffolk. Eight additional testing events will take place over the course of the month. All of them are free, and anyone can be test-

See COVID-19, 8

## News-Herald to move to temporary office

FROM STAFF REPORTS  
SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

The *Suffolk News-Herald* will move to a temporary office building beginning Monday as recovery and repair efforts are under way at the newspaper's South Saratoga Street office.

The newspaper's home at 130 S. Saratoga St. sustained heavy damage as a result of the EF-1 tornado that hit down-

See OFFICE, 6

### Business will rebuild

BY JIMMY LAROUÉ  
STAFF WRITER

Brandon House Furniture owner David Carter had just managed to get to sleep when his wife woke him up around 3 a.m. Tuesday, telling him she thought a tornado was right over top of them.

It turned out not to be the case — "just the wind blowing," he said — but a couple of calls soon after let him know that one of the two tornadoes confirmed to have touched down in Suffolk tore apart the store he co-owns with his sister, Carolyn

Wright. He got a call from his security company letting him know of broken glass in front of the store at 219 W. Washington St. Thinking it could have been from Tropical Storm Isaias, Carter told them not to call police. He got another call from an ex-employee. That person heard a police report of damage there, and drove by to take photos and send them to Carter.

That got Carter out of his house, and to the store with his son, Brandon around 4 a.m.

See TORNADO, 14



JIMMY LAROUÉ/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

David Carter, who owns Brandon House Furniture with his sister Carolyn Wright, said he was shocked to see his store just after 4 a.m. Aug. 4, less than an hour after an EF1 tornado heavily damaged the store.

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# Cleanup: After storm

Continued from page 1

it was time to get up.”

They were in the hallway when he called out to her. He couldn't tell if there was a tornado actually overhead, but he knew when the tree crashed down onto the roof.

As they sat on their porch Wednesday watching trees and debris being cleared from their street, and waiting for power to be restored, she looked at the bruise on her arm, looked at her husband and showed it to him. “You did that,” she said.

“When did I do that?” he asked.

“When you said get down on the floor, get down on the floor,” she said. “He was holding my arm. ... It just came up so quick.”

The tree that landed on the roofs of the two houses dangled into the Babbs' front yard. He said no water got into the house as a result of the damage.

The two tornadoes touching down in the city damaged 110 residential and commercial structures, according to the city's Department of Community Development. Damages ranged from minor losses, such as missing shingles, to total losses, with damage estimates at \$2.2 million.

The city advises that in addition to contacting private insurance companies, residents who have had structures affected should contact the Department of Community Development at 514-4150 to report damages.

Deputy Fire Chief Brian Spicer said Emergency Communications was notified of a tornado hitting downtown Suffolk at 3:44 a.m. Aug. 4. That tornado was an EF-1 with an estimated maximum wind speed of 100 miles per hour, according to the National Weather Service Wakefield office. That tornado formed near the Great Dismal Swamp and ended near Everets Road, accord-

ing to the weather service, going about 20 miles, measuring about 150 yards in width and lasting from 3:02 a.m. until 3:30 a.m.

The other tornado, a confirmed EF-0 with a maximum wind speed of 80 miles per hour, traveled 11.7 miles from a rural area west of the swamp to 3.5 miles southeast of Windsor, with a path width of 100 yards.

The Enhanced Fujita Scale classifies tornadoes into six categories, ranging from EF0 to EF5. An EF0 is the weakest, with winds of 65 to 85 miles per hour, with the strongest being EF5 at more than 200 miles per hour.

Spicer noted that Suffolk residents endured 10 tornado warnings in four hours, although some of them covered different areas.

Spicer said that between 3:10 a.m. Aug. 4 and 8 a.m. Aug. 5, Suffolk Fire & Rescue had received 197 calls for service, with eight reports of possible building collapse.

He said after the storm, operational battalion chiefs put fire apparatus in high impact areas, including Hall Place, Dill Road, Pleasant Street, South Wellons Street, Pinner Street, Riverview, White Marsh Road, Turlington Road and Freeman Mill Road. That was to provide information on shelters, call centers and provide assistance for any needs residents had.

Public Works Director L.J. Hansen said their crews cleared roads in a number of communities throughout the city.

Near the origins of the EF-1 tornado off of White Marsh Road, residents were still cleaning up two days later, as one house was taken completely off its foundation, and next door to that, much of the side to another home was taken off, with a small camper tipped over and damage could be seen throughout the property.



JIMMY LAROU/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD  
Crews clean up on Cedar Street after an EF-1 tornado that touched down just after 3 a.m. Aug. 4.

Debris was scattered throughout the path of the tornado, and tall trees snapped and limbs all around as power crews worked to restore power.

On Cedar Street, as the sound of chainsaws cut through the downed trees in the street, the Babbs were thankful that they were not hurt.

Said Johnnie Babb: “I thank the Lord for that.”



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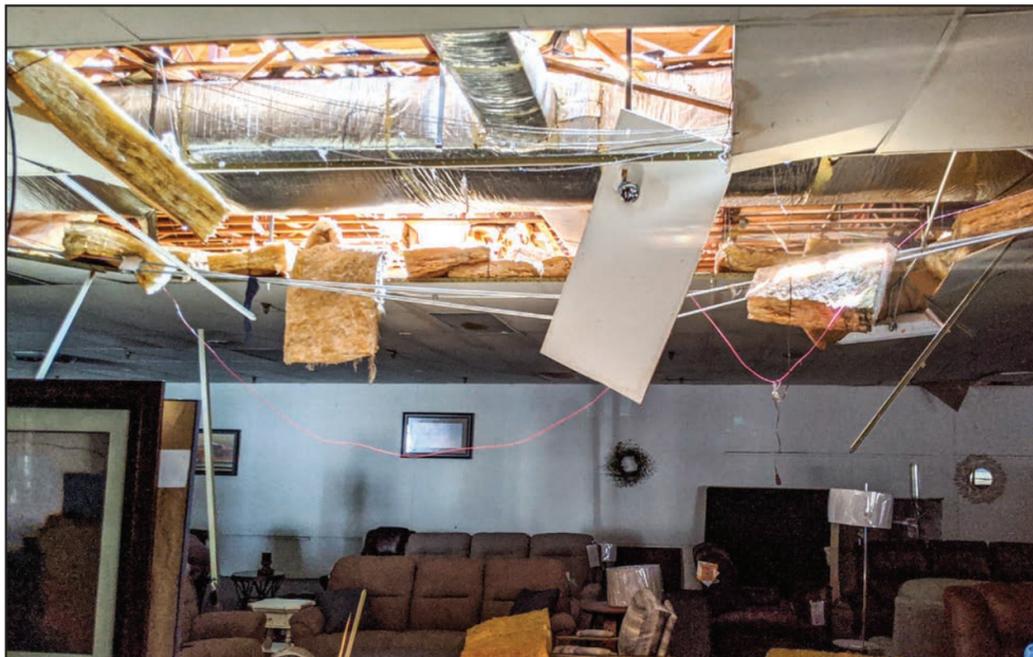


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JIMMY LAROU/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD  
Brandon House Furniture sustained heavy damage as the result of an EF-1 tornado that ripped through downtown Suffolk a little after 3 a.m. Aug. 4. The store plans to relocate temporarily to a building on the other side of West Washington Street while its building is repaired.

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## Tornado: Furniture store will relocate across street

Continued from page 1

The city's Emergency Communications had received a notification of a tornado at 3:44 a.m., according to Deputy Fire Chief of Technical Services Brian Spicer.

What they saw with their own eyes was stunning in its ferocity — large, gaping holes in its normally durable mansard slate roof. "It wasn't durable enough for this tornado, though. It just ripped into it, chewed it up." All of the store's glass windows were shattered and broken glass, scattered debris and water were all over the floor. The water was still dripping down into buckets more than a day later.

"There's nothing you can do. It was over, but there's no fixing it," David Carter said.

He placed a call to his insurance company, explained what was going on, and an adjuster was at the store later that morning.

"It's been a challenge to say the least," David Carter said. "It's been a shock to come down and find out your building's about tore up and everything, water leaking inside, roof's been pulled off, front's been blown off."

Ever since, he's been busy trying to clear furniture out of the store and bring crews in to clean it up, and arrange for it to be inspected to determine the extent of the damage so it can rebuild.

Sleep? Precious little. "Night before last, I had no sleep," David Carter said. "Last night I

had a hard time getting to sleep."

He was up by 7 a.m. Wednesday, back at the store continuing the cleanup process.

"We're trying to work everything out now," David Carter said.

The Brandon House's current home had been bought about 20 years ago during a foreclosure sale. Renowned furniture magnate George Thornton Jr., who had purchased a two-thirds interest in H.I. Jaffee Furniture Company in Suffolk, and bought or opened 12 more stores and a central warehouse, merging nine Thornton stores and 18 Heilig-Meyers Stores, had owned the building previously.

"We've got a lot to be thankful for," David

Carter said. "No one was hurt or killed."

What's next? The store is going back to its roots, across the street to 248 W. Washington St., where it had been previously. Though that location was also damaged and needs work, it will not require as much to get it operational and open for business, David Carter said.

"We're planning to rebuild," Brandon Carter said. "It's going to take some time, and we've got to get it straight. It's just a bump in the road."



TRACY AGNEW/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD  
Electric utility workers begin the process of restoring power in the Riverview neighborhood on Thursday.

## Super Bowl: Linemen shine

Continued from page 1

My son, he's 18 now, so they know when the storms come and trouble happens, it's time to roll."

Molinares arrived in the area early Wednesday and worked from 6 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. He was back up before the sun on Thursday morning, supervising Dominion crews as well as some from other utilities who came to help. In all, more than 7,000 workers are dedicated to the restoration efforts across Dominion's territory.

"My intent tonight is to get some lights on," Molinares said about the Riverview neighborhood. It would be a tall task, though. Dozens of trees were down across the neighborhood, having torn down numerous wires in addition to the broken poles and transformers.

Dominion spokesman Robert Richardson said the priorities in power restoration efforts are facilities like police and fire stations, 911 dispatch centers and hospitals.

"After that, you go for the biggest group of customers you can," he said. "If you can do some work

and get 40 people in a neighborhood on, you do that."

Richardson said local people had been grateful for the work of the power crews.

"I've talked to a handful of residents," he said.

"They're all in good spirits, they're all very patient, and we appreciate that very much. We're here to get the lights back on and bring some normalcy to these people's everyday lives."

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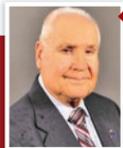
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TRACY AGNEW/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

The Suffolk News-Herald sustained damage including a blown-out window frame during Tuesday morning's EF-1 tornado spawned by Tropical Storm Isaias.

## Office: Moving to Main St. this week

Continued from page 1

town Suffolk early Aug. 4 during Tropical Storm Isaias. The roof is partially caved in or missing, a set of windows in the front was blown out, the roll-up door in the warehouse is partially missing, and a lot of rainwater was able to invade the building due to the structural damage.

*News-Herald* staff will move to a leased space at 157 N. Main St. while repairs to the building are under way. This space, right across from the Godwin Courts Building, was previously the offices of the *Virginian-Pilot's* Suffolk bureau.

People who need to reach the newspaper can call 757-774-6632 or email [news@suffolk-news Herald.com](mailto:news@suffolk-news Herald.com).

"Our commitment to the Suffolk community will not change," Editor

Tracy Agnew said. "We will just be operating from a different location temporarily as we continue to produce our

Wednesday and Sunday print editions and publish news around the clock on [www.suffolk-news Herald.com](http://www.suffolk-news Herald.com)."



  
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# A big thank you

Once again, Suffolk was in the crosshairs of a tornado — two at the same time, this time, in fact — and no lives were lost.

It was quite the marvel after the devastating EF-3 tornado that happened on April 28, 2008, in the afternoon. Anyone who remembers how awful the aftermath of that storm looked can attest that it seemed almost miraculous that nobody had perished.

Last year on May 11, a tornado hit a few residences not far from downtown without any casualties. And

now again, downtown and several neighborhoods surrounding it — and residences as far away as White Marsh Road — were struck by two torna-

does spawned by Tropical Storm Isaias. And again — although numerous homes and businesses were damaged and it will take quite some time for many people to rebuild — the most precious, important things are those that cannot be replaced or rebuilt. Once again, no lives were lost.

This can be attributed to many things, depending on your worldview — God's providence, good fortune, or simply the timely warnings from the great folks at National Weather Service Wakefield and a well-educated populace that knows what to do when they hear that warning. We like to think of it as God's providence with a heavy dose of good science and good work emanating from Wakefield.

But however you think of it, the fact remains, and we — as a business that also suffered heavy damage to our office — are so grateful for this piece of good news.

And as usual, Suffolk really shows how great it is after disaster strikes. Everyone from the teams of people who showed up early Tuesday to help devastated families rescue their belongings to the hundreds of electric utility workers who came from near and far to help get the lights (and, more importantly, the air conditioning) back on again demonstrated a commitment to their fellow human beings that makes us sit back and take note.

Thank you to all of those who have helped and are helping.

**'Everyone demonstrated a commitment to their fellow human beings that makes us sit back and take note.'**

# Church brings refreshment

BY TRACY AGNEW  
EDITOR

About a dozen volunteers from Community Church hit the streets in the heat on Thursday to help refresh electric workers who were getting the lights back on.

“It’s been good to see a smile on their face, because it’s hot out here, and they can’t just go and take a break whenever they want,” said Romy Feliciano, the Suffolk campus pastor for Community Church.

Volunteers made about 100 snack bags with treats like crackers, granola

bars, trail mix and chewing gum. They also took cold sports drinks and drinks to electric company workers and others who were outside in the heat on Thursday.

“We’re nearby, and we know this is a community that we’re a part of, and we saw some of the devastation that was going on,” Feliciano said. “We wanted to at least do something, because we can’t all go out here and cut down trees and put power lines back up, but for everybody that’s tirelessly working out here, we wanted to at least put a



TRACY AGNEW/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

Romy Feliciano, campus pastor of Community Church in Suffolk, hands a drink and snacks to Dominion Energy’s Andrew Molinares in Riverview on Thursday.

smile on their face.”

He said the snacks and drinks were purchased with funds from the church. The Suffolk campus meets at 1242 Holland Road.

“The generosity of everybody who tithes and does offerings, this is what they get to be a part of because of their faithfulness,” he said.



TRACY AGNEW/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

The Western Tidewater Community Services Board's South Saratoga Street location suffered heavy damage in the Aug. 4 tornado.

# WTCSB perseveres

**BY TRACY AGNEW**  
EDITOR

The Western Tidewater Community Services Board is persevering in its mission to serve local residents with mental health, substance abuse or intel-

lectual disability related problems, despite sustaining heavy damage to its downtown building in the Aug. 4 tornado.

“We have enjoyed that as an easily accessible location for the Suffolk community,” said Demetrios Peratsakis, executive

director of the WTCSB. “It’s been an important office location because of its essentially being downtown and its proximity to a number of folks that walk to obtain services.”

See WTCSB, 5

# WTCSB: Offering telehealth services, other locations

Continued from page 1

The office building, on South Saratoga Street, was one of several downtown commercial buildings that were heavily damaged in the EF1 tornado spawned by Tropical Storm Isaias. Others nearby included the *Suffolk News-Herald*, Brandon House Furniture and the Knight Finance building, the latter of which is being demolished soon.

Peratsakis said the ceiling is caved in at a number of places. A couple of air transporters on the roof were ripped free, and the second floor possibly has structural damage.

“Thank goodness we had no staff, no employees and no clients” in the building,” Peratsakis said. The tornado hit the downtown area between about 3

and 3:30 that morning.

In addition, about five to seven city vehicles used by the WTCSB in the Cherry Street parking lot across the street, adjacent to the Suffolk News-Herald, had windows blown out and other damage.

Peratsakis said a transition to some remote work during the pandemic actually set them up quite well for losing the use of the building, even if it’s temporary. Staff and clients have been receiving virtual services since March.

“Because we wanted to protect both staff and client safety, we moved as much as we could virtual,” Peratsakis said. “Many of the folks who have been receiving virtual services have not only done very well with it, but quite a

few of them actually prefer it.”

People have been able to arrange telehealth appointments, but those who are unable to access telehealth for whatever reason have still been able to come to WTCSB locations, Peratsakis said.

Many more people are in need of services from the WTCSB due to COVID-19.

“Since March 1, we’ve had almost 700 new people coming to us for service,” Peratsakis said. “That’s in addition to people we had been serving.”

He said that worry about the virus, confusion about mixed messages, anxiety about employment prospects, social unrest and moving into an election cycle have been “very

triggering for a lot of individuals,” causing more people to need to reach out for mental health services.

Peratsakis said he was grateful to the city and to the WTCSB’s board of directors for their support.

The Saratoga building will be out of commission for some time, but in the meantime, people can still access services, Peratsakis said. The WTCSB has three other locations in Suffolk: 5268 Godwin Blvd., 1000 Commercial Lane and 7025 Harbour View Blvd. Suite 119. There are also locations in Smithfield, Franklin and Courtland.

Those in need of services for themselves or a family member can call 758-5106.



RACHEL WARTIAN/SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

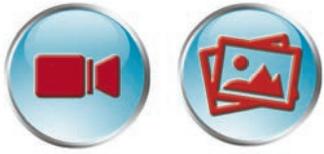
Demolition continued on the corner of Saratoga and West Washington streets on Aug. 25 after tornado damage earlier this month.

# Downtown buildings demolished

**FROM STAFF REPORTS**  
SUFFOLK NEWS-HERALD

Two downtown buildings that were damaged in Tropical Storm Isaias on Aug. 3-4 were demolished recently.

A building in the 300 block of East Washington Street was demolished late last week after storm damage



More photos and video available at [www.suffolknewsherald.com](http://www.suffolknewsherald.com)

was found several days after the severe weather moved through the area. The road was closed for several days

but reopened on Saturday after the building was torn down.

City spokesman Tim Kelley said the building is currently vacant.

On Monday, crews began tearing down the Knight Finance building at the southwest corner of West Washington and Saratoga streets.

It was severely damaged in a tornado spawned by Isaias early on Aug. 4. That intersection and the immediately surrounding area remain closed for an indefinite period of time.

The building was mostly vacant but did have at least one person living in an upstairs apartment at the time of the tornado.