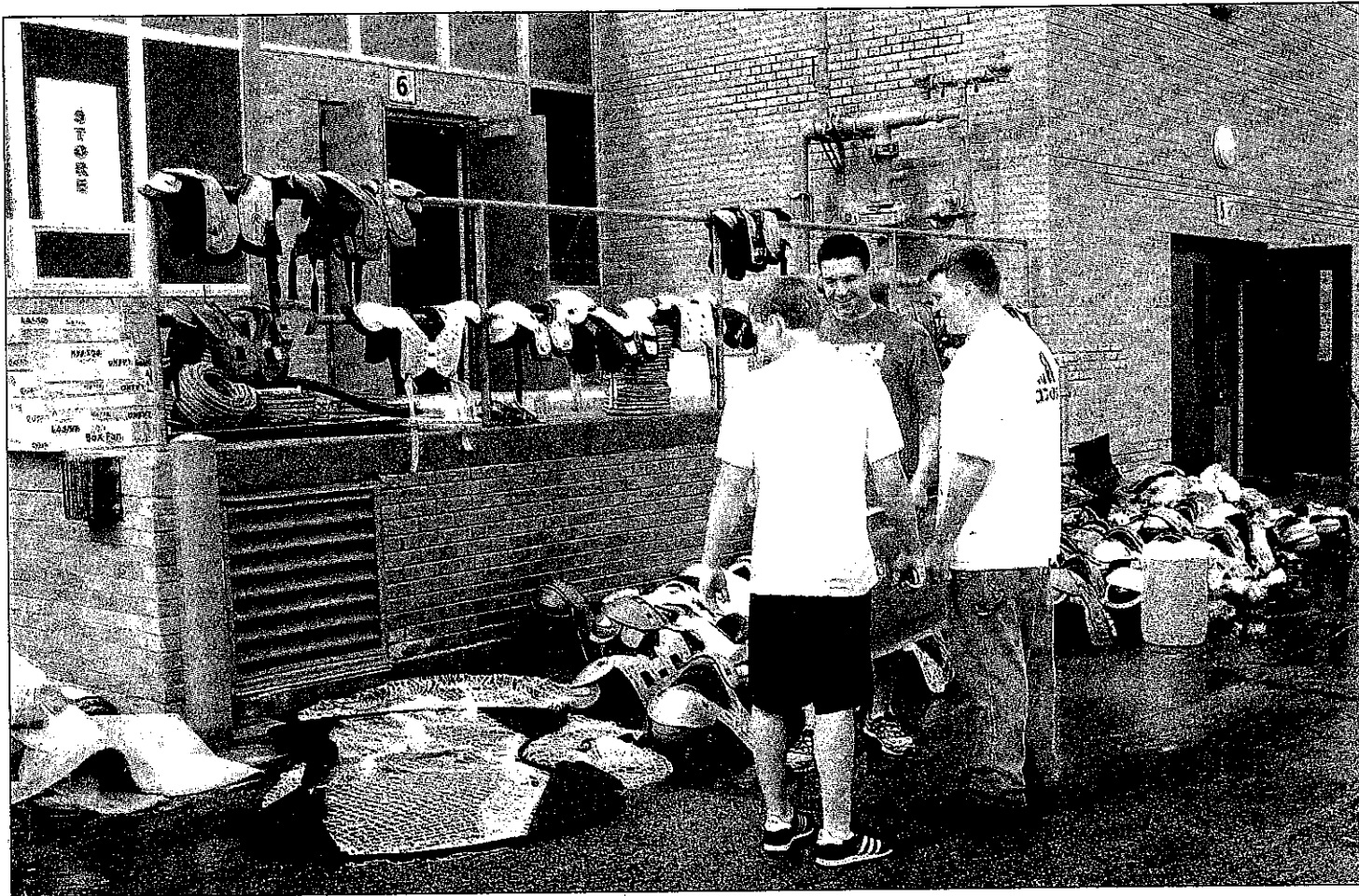


## Night of floods causes millions in damage

Lourdes High School among Catholic sites hardest hit by June 12 rain in Oshkosh



**FLOOD DAMAGE:** Volunteers in Oshkosh turned out last weekend to assist in the cleanup of Lourdes High School and St. John Neumann Middle School, which sustained major damage from heavy rain June 12. Above, Pat O'Neil, an HVAC contractor, wades through knee-deep water outside a basement door at Lourdes. At right, Lourdes students examine a row of football shoulder pads damaged by the rain. (Photos by Joe Wiedenmeier)



**By Patricia Kasten**  
Compass Associate Editor

OSHKOSH — "It's all gone."

Michelle Zowin, religious education coordinator at St. Jude Parish spoke sadly about the preschool room in the basement of the former Sacred Heart Church site on Knapp Street after record floods had hit the city June 12. Sewage and more than a foot of water had destroyed carpets, wall coverings and supplies. Even the toys had to be discarded.

"My families had donated things and made that a place for families to go," said Zowin. "It's all gone."

Heavy rain — totaling 12 inches in less than one week — left three-quarters of Oshkosh streets flooded June 12. Nearly half the city's homes and businesses have been damaged.

Other Catholic sites were also damaged:

- Lourdes High School and St. John Neumann Middle School had extensive water and sewage damage.

- The former Sacred Heart School, also on

Knapp Street, had six inches of water, causing minimal damage.

- Water came into the basement of the former St. John the Evangelist Church and School. Few things were stored in the building, though, since the site is only used occasionally.

- Water damage also occurred in McHugh Hall at the former St. Peter site on High Avenue (now Most Blessed Sacrament Parish).

- The basement in the rectory at the St. Josaphat site also had water damage.

- Even the heirloom Nativity set that had

graced Christmases at Sacred Heart Church was damaged by water and sewage.

"We had people washing it in bleach water on Sunday," said Tom Donovan, business manager for both Most Blessed Sacrament and St. Jude. "That didn't work very well. Now we have a restorer, Dolly Pahlow, who has done work at a number of churches. She will take and repaint the crib and Baby Jesus. Then we'll work at the other pieces from there."

See Flooding, Page 11

# Flooding causes at least \$5 million in damage to Oshkosh Catholic schools

Continued from Page 1

Donovan added that an insurance adjuster was already on site June 16, but a dollar amount on the damage is not yet determined.

Tammy Basten, diocesan director of facilities and properties, said that incidence reports have been filed with insurance. "We are just waiting estimates of the damage," she said.

Tony Blando, president of Oshkosh's Unified Catholic Schools (UCS), said his schools are "looking at multiple millions of dollars in damage: I've heard anywhere from \$5 million to \$10 million."

Lourdes High School and the attached St. John Neumann Middle School were the most heavily damaged. Water built up in the parking lot and caved in windows on the school's lower level. Flood waters rose over five feet, destroying classrooms, athletic equipment, carpets and computers. The parquet flooring in both schools' gymnasiums were flooded and will need to be replaced.

Some of the Lourdes' addition — completed in 2005 — was damaged. Additionally, there are buckling asbestos tiles in the older section of the school, which opened in 1959. Abatement will be costly, Blando said.

However, he added, the deeper story is of the volunteers who have come to help.

"It was an absolute miracle how people responded," Blando said. "We worked three solid days around the clock cleaning up and getting it ready. We had 75 people here on Father's Day, working the entire day. On Saturday, we had 123 volunteers. Fr. Tom Reynebeau, pastor of St. Jude, came over and had a 30-minute Mass (on June 15.)"

"It was amazing how people responded," Blando said, "and worked in deplorable conditions."

He said the big thing now will be

**"We worked three solid days around the clock cleaning up and getting it ready. We had 75 people here on Father's Day, working the entire day."**

— Tony Blando

recovery and trying to get Lourdes and Neumann ready for school on Aug. 28. He said they no longer need volunteers on site, but asked for prayers and financial aid, since they aren't certain that insurance will be able to replace everything lost.

The other Catholic schools — St. Frances Cabrini and Sr. Elizabeth Seton — were not damaged. Neither was St. Raphael Parish on the city's west side.

Sr. M. Sylvia Egan, provincial of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, said her community's retirement facility, Franciscan Courts, had no water problems during the storms. She also had not heard of damage at the nearby Mercy Medical Center, which is sponsored by her community.

"It got close to the cancer center," she said, "but a catchment basin is there, and water didn't get in." (A call to Mercy Medical was not returned as of press time.)

While the UW-Oshkosh campus was hard hit, with most of its buildings affected by water, the Neumann Center, the Catholic campus ministry site, was not damaged.

"We watched the intersection fill up in front," said Courtney Watson, campus minister, "but nothing happened. University people from upstairs came down and were waiting for it to clear up. They waited one-and-a-half hours and it kept pouring and the streets kept filling up. ... The longer we waited, the worse it got. I finally left at 6:40 p.m. and it took me an hour and a half to get home to Omro. It was awful."

Although Omro has been affected by

the flooding Fox River that runs through town, St. Mary Parish has not been in danger, since it sits southwest of the river plain.

Another site affected by the flooding, but not by water damage, was Father Carr's Place 2B, along Highway 41 in Oshkosh.

"On Thursday, when the water started rising, we started hearing that it was affecting three out of four streets and they were going to be closed," said executive director Joe Geniesse. "So we contacted the sheriff's department and said that we do have room here, since we are a shelter."

Geniesse said busses of evacuees started arriving by 11 p.m. and soon 80 people had been dropped off. Of those, 50 stayed to sleep for the night. Of the other 30, some got rides from relatives, while others stayed up all night in the Mother Teresa welcoming center at the Place 2B.

"The highways runs right in front of us," Geniesse said, "and we were looking out the windows and watching the cars splash by. And pretty soon they weren't moving. Then they closed the highway (from Oshkosh to Fond du Lac)."

Geniesse said the Place 2B had plenty of supplies for their overnight guests, adding that he could use a donation or two of laundry detergent to replenish their stock.

While it will take months to clean up the aftermath of the storms that hit Oshkosh this month, Tony Blando may have summed up that outlook best:

"We are alive and well and we are charging ahead."