

Storm:

Many roads treacherous

On westbound I-80, west of Longview Drive at Northgate Boulevard, wind gusts lifted a tractor-trailer rig loaded with Nabisco Nilla Wafers. It ended up jackknifed, blocking two lanes, according to the CHP. Two lanes were closed from 10:30 a.m. until about 1 p.m. while the truck was removed.

The driver, David Figueira, 27, of Sacramento, was taken to a hospital, where he was treated for minor injuries and released.

Altogether, CHP officers went to 65 collisions and 45 road hazards in the Sacramento area between 6 a.m. and 3 p.m. Wednesday, said Capt. Max Hartley.

In downtown Sacramento, several motorists stood beside their cars, which were crushed by uprooted trees or limbs.

"I'm just glad nobody was hurt," said Edward Graham of Stockton, looking at the wreckage that had been his green Dodge Stratus on Q Street near 15th.



Sacramento Bee/Jay Motter

Jason Hayes tries to control signs that blew down at Elk Grove Boulevard and Cresleigh Drive in Elk Grove. Blowing debris caused minor damage to vehicles around the area, but no injuries were reported.

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Sacramento Bee/Michael A. Jones

Above, an overturned truck and trailer slow traffic on eastbound Interstate 80 near Davis during Wednesday morning's downpour. California Highway Patrol officers at the scene said the truck driver was not injured in the crash. At right, a freeway entrance sign is nearly lost in a snow bank near Soda Springs in Nevada County.



Sacramento Bee/Brian Bear

Weather's worst likely over, but rain to continue

By Carrie Peyton Dahlberg,
M.S. Enkoji and Ralph Montaño
BEE STAFF WRITERS

A blast of wind and rain slammed across Northern California on Wednesday, sending trees crashing into homes, ripping at rooftops and churning up whitecaps in the storm-swollen Yolo Bypass.

The storm closed roads, knocked out power and dumped 1 to 3 inches of rain around the north state, but stopped short of creating a serious flood risk, state water officials said.

By late afternoon, puffs of white clouds were all that remained of the storm in the skies above Sacramento, but damage on the ground was more enduring.

City and county officials fielded close to 500 reports of trees or large tree limbs down, and at least three houses and 10 cars lay crumpled under fallen trees, they said.

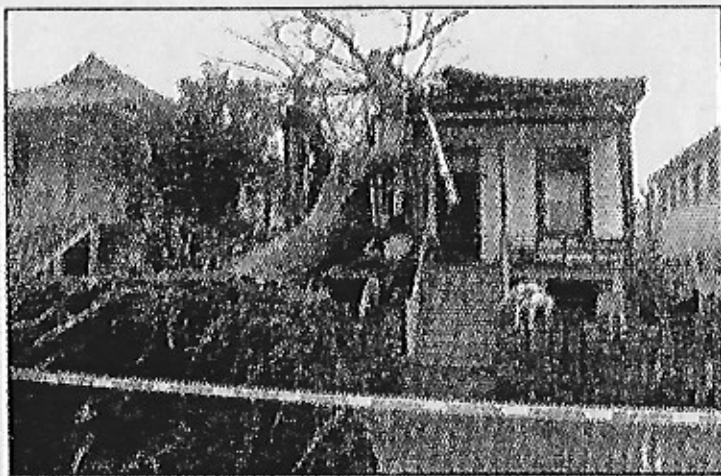
One Sacramento woman, inside her Victorian home when an elm plunged through its roof, had to be pulled free through a window but was unharmed.

More showers were predicted today and Friday, but without the ferocity of Wednesday's storm, with its gusts of up to 61 mph at Sacramento International Airport, said John Juskie, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

The winds ripped part of the roof off a school gym, and street flooding and telephone poles falling like bowling pins kept firefighters and police officers running.

At one point, California Highway Patrol

officers were dispatched to nine accidents in a 20-minute period in the Sacramento area Wednesday afternoon. Interstate 80 was closed near Longview Drive in North Sacramento for more than two hours because of flooding, and downtown light-rail service was temporarily halted.



An elm tree rests Wednesday on the Mansion Flats home of Mary Lucy Guajardo. Topped by winds, it crashed into a bedroom where she was making a bed just after 8:30 a.m. Briefly trapped, she escaped injury. See story, B1.

Sacramento Bee/
Randy Pench

"My drive from Fairfield this morning was the wildest drive I've had in 21 years over the (Yolo) causeway," said state climatologist Bill Mork. "There were whitecaps with spray up over the tops of the cars."

At Christian Brothers High School, the choir had been warming up in the gymnasium in preparation for an Ash Wednesday liturgy when there was "this racket on the roof," said Mark Warren, school president.

An 800-square-foot section of roofing was torn away, and although the roof wasn't open to the sky, water leaked through.

The religious gathering was cancelled and the Catholic tradition of applying palm ashes to the forehead was observed instead in classes, Warren said.

At Rio Americano High School, a 50-foot tree was uprooted near a classroom but narrowly missed the building.

"The lights went out about 9:10 a.m., but we are pretty much business as usual," said Principal Rob Hollingsworth. Students in classrooms with damaged windows were moved to the library. A steady flow of parents stopped by to take their children from classes, but most were taking it in stride, he said.

Similar school outages were reported throughout the region, with some schools closing and others continuing lessons. Deterding Charter Elementary School was without power for most of the school day, from just before 9 a.m. until five minutes after classes were dismissed at 3 p.m., but students forged on with peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches, making a quick substitute for cafeteria corn dogs.

Maria Lopez, spokeswoman for the Sacramento City Unified School District, said five schools - Joseph Bonnheim and Mark Hopkins elementary, Charles M. Goethe Middle School, John Still K-8 and Genesis High School - remained dark late Wednesday. She said parents should call (916) 643-9040 after 6 a.m. today to learn if the schools will be open.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District, which had its own wind problems after a redwood tree fell in the atrium of its customer service center, dealt with power outages at 101,849 homes and businesses. Most were momentary. Only 600 were expected to be without power by midnight.

Disruption rippled through public life, with a tree branch striking an overhead electrical line at 12th and Q streets in Sacramento about 9:30 a.m., forcing closure of downtown sections of light rail until 1:15 p.m., according to Bill Draper of Regional Transit. Buses shuttled people among light rail stations until power was restored.

"It was a tough day. The blessing is it happened in the middle of the day" when most people already had gotten to work, he said.

Isleton cancelled its City Council meeting because of the storm, which closed Isleton Road for hours when an eucalyptus tree 5 feet in diameter toppled across the road.

The storm set a rainfall record for the date, dropping 1.25 inches by midafternoon, easily passing the 1902 record of 0.9 inches, according to the National Weather Service. But it came nowhere near the rainiest day on record, Feb. 17, 1986, when 3.21 inches drenched Sacramento.

Everything from flying palm fronds to flooding and downed power lines snarled morning traffic, said Sacramento Police Capt. Joe Valenzuela. Blowing debris caused minor damage to vehicles, but no injuries were reported. Any flooding was under control by midafternoon, he said.

On the city's perimeter, high winds and flooding snarled traffic.

About 12:30 p.m., water began backing up in the area of I-80 at the Longview Drive exit because a pump lost power and, within minutes, the CHP began diverting traffic off the freeway onto Longview.

A collision on Roseville Road in the Longview Drive area had knocked out a pole and cut power in the area, including to the pump. Traffic was diverted at the Madison Avenue split. By 3 p.m., I-80 was reopened.

TROUBLE FROM ABOVE

Stormy weather

Wednesday's storm battered the region with high winds and heavy rain.

Wind speeds

Top wind speeds
Wednesday:

Sacramento International Airport

Gust: **61 mph**, 9:26 a.m.
Sustained: **40 mph**, 7:53 a.m.

Sacramento Executive Airport

Gust: **52 mph**, 9:10 a.m.
Sustained: **36 mph**, 8:43 a.m.

Mather Field

Gust: **64 mph**, 9:45 a.m.
Sustained: **49 mph**, 9:45 a.m.

Mount Diablo

Gust: **96 mph**, 9:17 a.m.
Sustained: **72 mph**, 7:17 a.m.



Sacramento Bee/Bryen Patrick

Brother George Van Grieken uses an umbrella against the elements Wednesday in the flooded Christian Brothers High School gym as Joe Guillherme sweeps water off the hardwood. High winds blew off parts of roof, and the accompanying heavy rains did the rest.

Rainfall



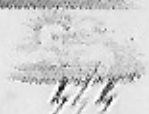
Rainfall totals for the 24-hour period ending 5 p.m. Wednesday:

Woodland	1.87"
Sacramento International Airport	1.80"
Rio Linda	1.68"
Rancho Cordova	1.35"
Orangevale	1.31"
Downtown Sacramento	1.25"
Elk Grove	0.90"

Forecast

Today

Storms
High 55°
Low 43°



Friday

Partly cloudy
High 56°
Low 41°



Saturday

Partly cloudy
High 58°
Low 44°



Source: National Weather Service; AccuWeather

Sacramento Bee

A CATASTROPHE TURNED BLESSING

By Bob Sylva '68

On the morning of February 25, 2004 -- Ash Wednesday, to be exact -- the forces of nature paid a visit to Christian Brothers High School. Throughout the north state, 60 mph winds and thrashing rains ransacked the landscape, toppling trees, crushing houses, knocking down power lines, closing roads, causing havoc.

In the school gymnasium, the student choir was warming up for that morning's peaceful liturgy when someone remarked about "this racket on the roof!"

It wasn't Santa Claus. It was the heavens opening up.

In seconds, an 800-square-foot section of the gym's roof was suddenly competing in a gigantic discus event, shards and fragments, the accumulated Sistine ceiling of years of reverence and screaming, landing in the parking lot, in the athletic fields. What was left was daylight. A deluge of water playing on the parquet floor. How biblical.

As with just about everything connected with long-graced and eternally protected Christian Brothers High School, it was an act of God -- sudden, swift, mysterious.

But, ultimately, provident. A catastrophe turned blessing.

Oh, things were mopped up soon enough. You probably chuckled over that comical -- in hindsight -- news photo of Brother George Van Grieken, FSC strolling through "Lake CB" holding a blithe umbrella as maintenance chief Joe Guilherme and his loyal crew labored furiously to sponge, squeegee and pump the cascade of rainwater off the gym floor. But Christian Brothers High School, true to its character,

took this latest, sodden setback in stride. Repairs were made, campus life resumed.

Still, as Ash Wednesday reminds us all of our mortality, this unexpected event underscored a fault we here have known about for some time but have failed to rectify. The CB gym, built in 1956 is at the end of its life span. The structure, its decades of heroic service notwithstanding, is old, outmoded, a beaten warrior. It's a relic compared with the expansive athletic and performing arts centers being built today and falls woefully short of the unparalleled standards that Christian Brothers strives to achieve in all its campus facilities, as evidenced by its new Math, Science, and Technology wing.

Thus, responding to the gusty nudge from our Lord above, Christian Brothers High School is pleased to announce an exciting, unprecedented campaign to thoroughly upgrade and modernize the school gymnasium. Just a short list of improvements includes: air conditioning, a sound-dampening baffle for the ceiling, a concert-quality sound system, Broadway-worthy theatrical lighting, and completely renovated locker rooms, for both girls and boys, with new showers, fresh tilework, polished surfaces and sparkling-clean lavatories. Sounds, and smells, like heaven, no?

Better yet, the school is proud and pleased, if not tearful, to announce that the new complex will be named The Ron Limeberger Memorial Gymnasium.

Sadly, the Christian Brothers community lost its most devoted, most enthused supporter this year, a mighty passing that was a portent of the gym's unpeeling. On January 8, Ron Limberger died of a sudden heart attack. He was 69 years old. He leaves his wife of 46 years, Joan, twin sons, Mike and Mark, both CB graduates (Class of '76), daughter Jill Sackett, graduate of Bishop Manogue (Class of '79), plus eight grandchildren, including Melissa Limeberger (Class of 1997), Matthew Limeberger

(Class of 2001) and Amanda Limeberger, 16, a returning junior at CB.

Asked what it is like to be Ron Limeberger's granddaughter, Amanda says, "It's an honor. Whenever people find out who I am, there are always stories about him. Everyone always has lots of memories." She laughs. "Sometimes, they give me a hard time!" (One can only imagine the playful ribbing, the knowing nods of respect.) "But I'm proud to go to CB. It meant a lot to my grandfather."

No, Amanda, it meant everything.

Ron Limeberger was Mr. Christian Brothers. He graduated from the school (Class of '53), where he was student body president, an all-city basketball and baseball player. After Sacramento State College, he came back to CB. And never left. He taught for 42 years. He coached basketball and baseball, the latter sport for 31 years, compiling an incredible 431 wins. He taught endless classes of health, P.E., and driver's ed. How many students on the road today learned to drive from Mr. Limeberger?

Omnipresent, he seemed to live on campus. Upon his retirement in the spring of 2000, Mr. Limeberger -- crusty outside, cream filling inside; but not a man prone to wax philosophic -- in a farewell story, reflected: "A good teacher is a good coach. A good coach is a good teacher. Once you learn to teach, it just sort of flows with you. Each kid is individual. I figured up the other day I had about 16,000 students over the last 42 years. It's not only the ones you've touched but the ones who've touched you. When a student comes back later in life and says, 'Hey, thanks!' Then I've done my job."

What a job. What a legacy he left the school. "What you see is what you get with Ron Limeberger," Mr. Greg Meegan, a popular history teacher at CB, once remarked. Meegan doesn't

mince too many words himself. "He only has one face, and it's always to the front. He is brutally honest, courageous under fire, and the most loved teacher and coach I have ever known."

Jack Witry, a retired teacher whose own loyalty to CB is boundless, recalls his colleague and fellow coach, saying, "He loved that school. His heart and soul were in that school. He dedicated most of his life to the school. The school came first."

The Limeberger family is both pleased and humbled by this honor bestowed upon their dearly missed husband and father. Says Joan Limeberger: "He absolutely loved CB. That was the love of his life. I would always tease him that CB came first, that the kids and I were second. My family is thrilled. This is just so wonderful. I think it is deserving. But I only wish he could be here to see it."

And what would Ronnie's reaction be? "He would cry," assures Mr. Witry. And what will the gymnasium naming achieve? "It will bring back memories," declares Mr. Witry. "Everybody who knows Christian Brothers knows Ronnie Limeberger. It will be an identity."

Indeed. But beyond that, it will be an advantage. Athletic teams and cultural performances will improve, liturgies will soar, assemblies will inspire. The school will rally and triumph. You doubt such miracles on Martin Luther King Boulevard? Hey, God didn't raise the roof for nothing. So close your eyes. Take a seat in the new gymnasium. Watch the action. Hear the thunder. And amid the cheers, hear the inimitable rat-tat-tat patter of Ronnie Limeberger.

With such a spirit present, how can we ever lose?

Bob Sylva is an alumnus and current parent. He is a staff writer for the Sacramento Bee and prepared this piece to aid the Major Gifts Committee in its fundraising efforts.