

Record flood drowns North Dakota school

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On Apr. 29, when many Bloomington High School students were just coming home from spring break, students at Oak Grove Lutheran School realized they would not be going back to school for awhile after the Red River broke through a metal wall north of their campus.

Oak Grove Lutheran School in Fargo, N. D. is a private, Christian school grades 6-12 with around 300 students and 30 faculty and staff. The five buildings on the campus include Jackson Hall (the middle school), the Administration Building (the high school), Eid Center (the cafeteria), the Ellig Center for Wellness and the Scheels Center for the Performing Arts.

A metal wall behind the Administration Building broke around 1:15 am Mar. 29, and began to shoot out water from near the ground “like a fire hydrant.” Aaron Zinter, a Bloomington native and now the Director of Music at Oak Grove, was about 10 feet away when it broke.

“When it happened, [I] immediately called our supervisor from my cell phone,” said Zinter. “We tried filling the area with sandbags, but they quickly disappeared in the hole created by the rushing water. In a few minutes, the entire area was filled with two or three feet of cold water and rising fast while pouring into the basement of Administration Building. We continued sandbagging other spots until the City of Fargo officials secured the area from any civilians around 3:30 am.”

Officials and the community were quick to respond, with the Army Corps of Engineers arriving on the scene in less than 20 minutes of the breach. They



(Above) Water surrounds Jackson Hall, the middle school building at the Oak Grove Lutheran campus. (Right) A helicopter delivers sandbags to the school's campus.

Photos courtesy of Aaron Zinter

began, in teams of 80-100 people, to sandbag and pump water out of the flooded area. Thirty volunteers from Oak Grove also worked to try to stop the flood. National Guard helicopters have kept up a constant flow of sandbags and supplies as well as doing 11 drops of 1,000 pounds worth of sandbags behind the breached wall.

Members from the community of Fargo have also made 3.5 million sandbags in one week as well working around the clock to build sandbag walls to protect their neighborhoods from the rising water.

The only building at Oak Grove with major damage is the Administration Building with a flooded basement, and a few feet of standing water on the first floor. Fortunately, most of the other buildings remain untouched; the Administration Building stopped the flood from getting any farther. Dozens of pumps that remove 700 gallons of water per minute are used to

help remove the water in the Administration Building.

This flood set a record high for the Red River at 40.82 feet, breaking a record that was over a hundred years old.

Five homes that were near the Red River have also been lost, with 215 homes receiving damage from the flood. Many families had to evacuate.

“Anyone in Fargo would have their own story about the Flood of 2009,” said Zinter. “Everyone that was here experienced a stressful war-like atmosphere for a good week or so, and we all are expecting another crest in just a couple of weeks.”

Students are now back at Grove Oak Lutheran school; even so, the school continues to prepare for a possibly higher crest later this month. However, a motto that has emerged from the flooding shows that the citizens of Fargo are not going to back down: “We do what is heroic simply because it is necessary.”

