

CANNON COURIER

Home of Ellis Brandon

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Readyville revival



door, and everybody (neighbors) was saying, 'Are you all right?' And I got out. It was very scary. I felt like it was going to hit me. I moved back the first part of November into a new trailer. It doesn't feel like home," said the octogenarian, who misses her former home sweet home.

'Resilient people'

Next-door neighbors to Stingley, Peggy Flitcraft and her grown son Robby were trapped in separate sections of their charming, early-1900s, two-story structure after the winds hit. Peggy was crammed as tight as a bug in a rug in a hollow space with her little dog, Belle, while Robby was ensnared as well a short distance away but close enough so she could talk to him.

Recollecting the tempest, she describes it as being "unbelievable! It changed the way I see people. It decluttered my life. If I ever questioned the existence of God, when I saw that pile of rubble we were under, I sure don't now. I look at the street now, and it surprises me how resilient the people are, coming back with a force."

She and Robby moved into their new home on the same piece of ground in early November. There was one new addition: an above-ground tornado shelter in her garage.

'A year of not being here'

The Logan family (Andrew and Kristy Logan and teenage daughters Adalley and Loraley) lived in their house on the other side of Stingley before the effects of the tornado left them homeless.

Crawling into a little hall closet and huddling together, the four waited it out but were unable to shut the door. They had been in the closet for less than a minute when they heard the tornado and whistling sounds as the twister tried to suck the air out of the house. They walked away physically unscathed, but the aftermath has been a trial.

"We chalked up a year of not being here," said Andrew, whose family moved into their new house on the same footprint in late January. "Basically, we were displaced and didn't know what we had. Most people plan their house for years. We had to build a house and had only weeks trying to figure out the right way to go. It's an experience we don't want to do again."

'We just did what we had to do'

"That night was unbelievable. We were just in shock," said Teresa Tate, who has nicknamed herself "a Readyville rock" because she has lived in the same house on Readyville Street most of her life. "When daylight came, and we saw it, it was unbelievable: that in between 10 and 15 seconds everything could be gone."

Teresa and her husband, Joe, hid from the tornado in their basement. The winds demolished five structures on

See Revival/A8

RIDERS ON THE STORM: Peggy Flitcraft, her son Robby (not pictured) and dog Belle were among the survivors of the April 1, 2023, tornado that shattered the Readyville community one year ago. "Belle was with me when they (rescuers) cut me out (of her collapsed home)," said Flitcraft, seen here with son Brendon Cox, who was not in the house that night. Cox holds a circa 1880s porcelain clock that came through the storm without a scratch. (Ken Beck photos)

One year after tornado, village springs back to life

Ken Beck
For the Courier

A year ago around 1:45 a.m. on April Fools' Day, a mighty wind came crashing directly into the heart of tiny Readyville and turned the lives of its residents upside down. Ten houses were destroyed and approximately 30 others damaged.

Today, most of those Readyvillians are right-side up, although they retain haunting memories of the cataclysmic event that forever changed this hamlet straddling the Cannon-Rutherford County line.

The National Weather Service reported the damage was caused by an EF-2 tornado with peak winds at 130 miles per hour. The twister covered 16 miles in length and a quarter-mile wide at its maximum.

Among local landmarks destroyed or mangled were

the Readyville Mill complex, the antebellum Corners mansion, Russell's Market, the old Tilford Lumber store and the Readyville Post Office.

On the bright side, there were no fatalities and only two minor injuries were reported. However, there were at least half a dozen miraculous escapes where houses caved in around the inhabitants, who walked away without a scratch.

Catching up with survivors

The Cannon Courier connected recently with several survivors to see how things were going.

Rosalie Stingley, 86, has lived in Readyville for 33 years. Asked about that fateful night, she shared, "I don't want to go there again. I was sitting up watching the news all night. They told us to find shelter. A few seconds later, I got off my sofa and took a few steps, and the walls started shaking, and the walls fell on the sofa right where I had been sitting."

"I opened the door to the laundry room, and there was nothing there but just a floor. I walked out the back

New Forever Stamp commemoration



Heather Moulder holds up the finished new Forever High Lonesome Sound Bluegrass Stamp and art work she designed. (Keith Ready photo)

Event to be held at Readyville Post Ofce

Keith Ready
Cannon Courier

The United States Postal Service will commemorate

the issuance of a new Forever Stamp depicting High Lonesome Sound Bluegrass at a special event Saturday, April 6th in Readyville. Local Cannon County resident, Heather Moulder, was selected to design the stamp.

"The Postal Service found me through Hatch Show Prints who is one of the oldest operating letterpress shops in America. They turn 145 this year. I've been working for them for almost 13 years now. They work in the traditional wood cut style. Because the stamp is bluegrass themed the Post Ofce wanted something put together in the traditional way," explained stamp designer and Cannon County resident Heather Moulder. "I was just really fortunate they liked my work they found through the print shop."

The stamp is easily recognizable by bluegrass fans as the header is "High Lonesome Sound." The term is used to describe the sound of bluegrass and folk music.

Saturday morning, April 6th, there will be an official unveiling of the stamp during a commemoration by the United States Postal Service. The event starts at 9:00 a.m. and will be hosted at the Readyville Post Ofce, located at 1828 Old Woodbury Pike.

"When I submitted the artwork, it was around the time the tornado hit in Readyville, and I love and support the Readyville Post Ofce. I'm glad it was repaired so part of this will be a celebration for Readyville. I'll bring a printing press and I made some Readyville prints I'll be giving away."

There will be musical entertainment after the ceremony from 10-11 a.m. from a variety of touring musicians from Nashville.

A graphic designer, print maker and musician, her work has appeared on posters for musical artists such as Aretha Franklin, Loretta Lynn, and Paul McCartney.

Moulder earned her BFA in graphic design from Middle Tennessee State University. She also serves as the White Oak Program Coordinator at the Arts Center of Cannon County where she organizes exhibits

and events for Tennessee artists. She creates her own artwork, freelance design projects at her home studio.

The Bluegrass stamp is her first project for the U.S. Postal Service

The 'Breeze' sentenced to eleven years

Courier Staff Report

A Cannon County man will be spending the next 11 years in federal prison after being sentenced Friday, March 22nd. 62-year-old Clifton Knight pled guilty in August 2023 to a three count indictment charging him with three Nashville bank robberies.

Nicknamed the "Breeze" after how quickly Knight got in and out of the banks, Knight robbed a SunTrust (now Truist) bank on January 4th on Hobbs Road and made out with over \$3,000. Knight collected more than \$5,000 on February 4th robbing another SunTrust branch on Old Hickory Boulevard.

Four days later on February 8th, Knight robbed Fifth Third Bank on Donelson Pike and left with more than \$4,000. A witness followed Knight in his getaway car and took photos of the license plate which helped investigators identify him. He was arrested a short time later.

Records show he was previously convicted and sentenced to serve 37 months for a bank robbery in Hermitage in 2012.

After Knight completes his sentence, he will be placed on three years of supervised release.

PRINCETON REVIEW

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Five Years in a Row

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Revival from A1

their land including a house next door, a workshop, log schoolhouse, horse barn and greenhouse, while their home escaped with minor damages.

Tate has a country store behind her house that's sort of her own private Readyville museum. The roof has been replaced, but it has been boarded up and she has not been in it since the day after the tornado.

"I'm still totally amazed I can see directly over into town (old Highway 70). The house across from Russell's Market is still a wreck. At least seven houses were destroyed on Readyville Street and Highway 70, and at least a dozen damaged, not counting automobiles, trucks, and motor homes. It's sad. It's a trauma to all of us. If it was sitting outside, it was tore up," said Tate.

"A neighbor across the street said it would be a year before we get back to normal. It's going to take more than a year. We just did what we had to do.

People had insurance and waited a long time to get their houses rebuilt and repaired.

"The Corners is coming back to life. Everybody is back in new houses on Readyville Street. Randy Tilford got a new house. We're still Readyville strong, I guess you could say. People asked, 'What y'all gonna do?' 'Well, we're gonna do what we have to,'" said the collector of historical Readyville items.

Heartbroken the storm vanquished the school bell that once rang children to class at the old Readyville Elementary School, Tate has reclaimed another bit of the community's history.

The two hand-hewn rock columns that held up the front porch to Russell's Market, previously Burnette's Grocery, are now on her grounds due to the efforts of her husband and Russell Davenport.

Mill site will become country store

While the crumpled Readyville Mill crashed to the ground, the property it sat on is now in the hands of Murfreesboro natives Matt and Ann Bratton, who late last summer bought the seven-

and-a-half acres of land and have been clearing the wreckage since September.

(Note: The original Readyville Mill was constructed by community founder Charles Ready in 1812-1813 and burned in the 1860s. The tornado demolished the second version, a four-story, water-powered, stone-ground grist mill erected in the 1870s.)

The Brattons have salvaged an incredible amount of lumber, most of it white oak that went into the landmark structure, and have decisive plans of how they are going to repurpose it.

"We're planning a general store and hope to have local meats, honey, breads, produce and bulk grain. They'll be a kitchen and we'll probably sell sandwiches. Coffee is a definite," said Ann.

Added Matt, "We're going to call it the Readyville Mill Store. One day, we'd like to mill again."

"But it would be electric-powered, and we'd love to make our own bread," chimed in Ann. "We'd like to have big porches and picnic tables on the grounds overlooking the river. You would not be here to just buy stuff but also come and spend some time."

The general store will sit on the site of Coopers at the Mill kitchen, which may get a new foundation.

Besides the mill, the outbuildings that housed Coopers at the Mill dining room and kitchen were ravaged by the storm, while the miller's house and a log cabin survived.

The couple had surveyed the mill several years ago when it was up for sale but decided to pass on it at the time

because "it was too much of a historical responsibility," said Matt. Giving up on the mill they set their sights on Murfreesboro where they considered opening a bulk grain store and then had an itch to buy an old country store and explored three counties trying to find the one.

"We had wanted to buy Russell's Market site when it auctioned, then this came up. So it worked out," Ann recalled.

"We just want to get the doors open," said Matt. "We want a place where folks can get something to eat, grab some groceries and goods and hang around for a while. Our goal is to use salvaged materials from the mill for most of the furnishings and shelving in the new store."

The couple is hoping they can complete their project next year.

Corners coming around

Besides the loss of the mill, the landmark 1820s brick mansion called The Corners, constructed by Readyville

founder Charles Ready, took a major blow and lost its roof and portion of a back wall.

Owner Brandon Urban was out of state when the tornado struck, but his wife, Heather Smith, and their three children were at home and fed for shelter in the basement. The storm left them trapped for a time until neighbors dug them out.

The antebellum home is currently under reconstruction with an expansion on the back side.

Urban shared a few details about the makeover, saying, "Things are moving now. We've got all of our plans down, footage poured and everything framed up but the kitchen. We should be dried in about two weeks from now.

"We added a three-car garage on the back of the old footprint of the house, and our kids' bedrooms will be upstairs. It will all be brick. I saved some 23 pallets of the original brick," said Urban, who is hopeful they might move back by Christmas.

Was it a difficult decision to rebuild rather than demolish?

"Yes and no. You had about 75 percent of the

people coming by saying 'you have to save it,' and 20-25 percent saying, 'hey, man. Ain't no use in saving it. Just doze it down and build from scratch.' It was a tough decision but in our hearts we think we made the right decision."

Describing the experience, he said, "We say all the time. It sucks to lose all your crap and go through it. But we gained so much more than we lost through the help of the community, our church, our kids' schools and all the people we met that came out to help. I think it's gonna make our kids stronger and more resilient. Everybody on this street all came closer together from it. It's kind of weird to say, but it's been a blessing. What else can we do but persevere?"

As a side note, a massive pecan tree in the backyard was uprooted by the tornado and crashed into the house. Urban has slabbed the wood and plans to make tables and furniture "so that tree may live in peoples' homes."

Replacing Russell's Market

Last but not least, a new business in a new structure will take the space where Russell's Market stood.

Paige Bailey of Pastime Barbershop in Murfreesboro shared, "We were hoping to be rocking and rolling and break ground this year but do not have a set date. We plan to name it Pastime Ladies and Gents. Whenever we get done, we will have another site in the building for lease and will have two apartments upstairs."

Remembering the 'Super Outbreak' 50 years ago

The April 3-4, 1974, tornado outbreak was one of the worst tornado outbreaks to ever affect the U.S. Dubbed the "Super Outbreak," at least 148 tornadoes struck 13 states from the Gulf Coast to the Great Lakes over a 16-hour period from the afternoon of April 3, 1974, into the early morning hours of April 4, 1974. When it was over, 330 people were dead and 5,484 were injured. Damage from all of the tornadoes combined added up to a path more than 2,500 miles long.

Across Middle Tennessee, at least 24 tornadoes affected areas along and east of the I-65 corridor, making this the largest known outbreak of tornadoes to ever impact the mid-state. In fact, several other weak tornadoes also likely touched down that were never officially recorded. The Super Outbreak is considered the worst tornado outbreak to strike the Upper Cumberland Region, with 38 people killed and hundreds of others injured.

The above information comes from the webpage, www.weather.gov/ohx/19740403, which serves to commemorate this historic event with a look back at the 24 tornadoes that struck Middle Tennessee that day, with maps, photos, videos, newspaper articles, research and more.

Thomas P. Grazer in his book, "Significant Tornadoes 1680-1995," noted the April 4, 1974, tornado that hit Cannon and DeKalb counties moved northeast from Sycamore to Dowelltown and a Cannon County woman was killed in a trailer at Sycamore.

The Tennessean reported the tornado wiped out 40 percent of Dowelltown and did \$1.5 million in damages to the village. It destroyed the branch bank of DeKalb County Bank, Dowelltown Elementary School, the Community Center, the post office, several store structures and many homes and trailers. Also destroyed was Dowelltown Manufacturing Company, which left 200 people out of work. On that dark day, tornadoes killed 44 in 12 Tennessee counties.



The Corners, the antebellum mansion erected by Readyville founder Charles Ready in the 1820s, is in the reconstruction process. The owners hope to be able to move back in by Christmas.



Standing near the foundation of the Readyville Mill, which was demolished by the tornado, new mill property owners Matt and Ann Bratton continue to clean this site on the East Fork of Stones River and intend to build a Readyville Mill Store. "We're planning a general store and hope to have local meats, honey, breads, produce and bulk grain. They'll be a kitchen and we'll probably sell sandwiches. Coffee is a definite," said Ann.



For more than 80 years these hand-hewn stones stood in two columns in the front of Russell's Market and Burnette's Grocery on old Highway 70. They have been reclaimed by Readyville's "Rock," Teresa Tate, who has a homemade country store holding a variety of artifacts reflecting the community's history. Alas, the tornado damaged her store and needs repairs. It is not open to the public.



Octogenarian Rosalie Stingley, a Readyville resident for more than 30 years, lost her home in the tornado but moved back on her lot into a new trailer in early November.



Looking down from Peak's Hill to the east along old Highway 70, the green structure at left center is the Corners, the home of Readyville founder Charles Ready.