

LOCAL

KM area gets rain, hail but drought still not over

EMILY WEAVER

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A storm brewed above Bethlehem Road around 4 pm on June 12 and with the thunder and lightning came damaging hail.

Ranging in size from a peanut to a 50-cent piece, the hail ravaged the plants and crops outside of Sarah Cooper's house. It ripped large holes in some of her elephant ears and her outdoor flower garden was laid to waste. "My little flowers were so pretty. I said, 'I'm not going to have to buy any more flowers.' But now I've got to replace them," Cooper said.

The crops in her niece's garden caved under the pressure of the blunt force trauma. The squash plants that were about knee-high were squashed. The beats were beaten. The watermelon - gone.

She said that the beating lasted for about 25 minutes. "It was coming down so fast and it lasted so long," Cooper added. "It was really something to look at but I wouldn't have wanted to be out in it. The whole ground was white. You couldn't see the grass."

Cooper's little Dachshund dog, Coby, stayed right by her side during the storm. He's not a big fan of the rain, thunder, lightning and hail. The beautiful annuals and plants in her screened-in porch were safe from the storm as was her vehicle that was parked in her carport. But evidence of the attack could still be found on Wednesday morning. Although reduced in size, the hail was still piled under a bush next to her house. Pieces of leaves were scattered throughout the yard and driveway.

A couple of hours after the storm had passed, Cooper grabbed a few handfuls of Mother Nature's bullets, sealed them in a plastic bag and threw them in the freezer to show her



EMILY WEAVER/HERALD
Sarah Cooper looks at the damage caused by June 12's bad hail storm. Her niece's garden was almost completely destroyed.

friends.

And friends may have needed proof because Nick Hendricks, with the City's Electric Department, said that most of the bad storms seem to have bypassed the city of Kings Mountain. "We've had zero calls (for outages) as far as I know," he said.

Although the storms didn't seem to cause much electric damage, a squirrel got in to the Margrace substation at around 8 am Sunday morning and knocked Duke Power and nearly 1,000 residents offline for about an hour and a half.

Over the past few weeks, storms have been selective in their targets, but droughts are

affecting just about everyone. Governor Mike Easley recently added four more counties in Western North Carolina to the list of those suffering from extreme or severe drought. As of today, 21 counties make up the list. He has directed all state agencies within these counties "to stop all non-essential water use and all citizens are urged to voluntarily reduce their water consumption by at least 10 percent."

Although Cleveland County currently falls in the category of Moderate Drought instead of severe or extreme, as the weather heats up, nothing sounds more inviting than a cool, refreshing rain - hold the hail.

youngest paid fire chiefs in the state. He said that although he is the only paid employee of the department, a lot of the volunteers are ready to go in a minute's notice, rivaling response times of other volunteers. "I've known all of the firefighters for several years now," he said. "They're very enthusiastic about their job and they've had a lot of training."

The 85-year-old department protects a radius of 15 square miles and provides mutual aid to outlying communities in North and South Carolina. They run both fire and medical or first responder calls, totaling around 500 a year.

Davis gives credit to three key people and mentors who have helped him get to where he is today: KMFDF Chief Frank Burns, Hendersonville Fire Chief Lovelace and Deputy Fire Marshal Davis. He said Chief Burns "did an excellent job prepping me for this advancement." Others at KMFDF have also given him a lot of support, insight and

encouragement throughout the years.

"He's going to do a great job in Tryon," Burns said. "I'm real proud of him. He's always had a good heart and done a great job here."

"I am very proud of his advancement in the fire service and I am pleased that he considers me a mentor," Lovelace said. "He was always a joy to be around and Tryon is lucky to have him."

There are times when he misses Kings Mountain and his family in Shelby. He is still on the part-time roster at KMFDF and still likes to listen to the Cleveland County fire calls on the radio. He said that he has had to catch himself a few times saying Kings Mountain instead of Tryon. But he loves his new position and the firefighters he works with.

"You never could've told me when I graduated high school that I would one day be a fire chief," Davis said.

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In Polk County he worked with the sheriff's office as a fire investigator and has also acted as the assistant fire chief in Columbus since October 2006. Davis received his arson investigator certification from Columbia Southern University, where he is also currently pursuing a master's degree in Public Administration.

He said that it feels surreal, but exciting being the chief of a fire department today. "I was at a point in my career where I felt like I was ready for this," Davis added. "I think the neatest thing about it is that there is not a thing that I've done in Tryon that I didn't do here in Kings Mountain. The way that the two departments mirror each other is remarkable."

In Tryon, he leads a 35-member volunteer fire department. At the age of 32, he is one of the

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