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HEATHER WRIGHT PHOTO

Brooke Fire Rescue Firefighter Trevor Oke stops at his parent's home on Henry Street in Alvinston to see the damage brought by a brief but intense storm which toppled countless trees including several of the large pines in his parent's yard. While trees blocked most streets in the community, emergency vehicles were able to get through within hours as neighbours came out with chainsaws to help public works crews and firefighters move trees off the road. There were no injuries reported in what researchers now say was a downburst.

'It was just incredible; the rain was sideways'

Heather Wright
The Independent

A storm which roared through Lambton County may have lasted only 15 minutes, but it has left a mark on Alvinston.

Countless trees were toppled in the Brooke-Alvinston community and with more destroyed in the surrounding rural areas and in Inwood in what tornado researchers now say was a downburst. (See story page 2.)

Sarnia and Point Edward were hit by the storm first and as it moved across all of southwestern Ontario, high winds of up to 130 km/h and hail left a trail through rural Lambton, bringing down a barn in Wilkesport, cutting a path through a cornfield on Petrolia Line and leaving large hail in Courtright.

At 4:16 pm, Kristina Podolinsky was in her Morrell Street home in Alvinston with her two kids when the when the wind started picking up and a tornado warning blared through her phone.

By 4:35 pm, the storm had knocked down her fence and given her quite a scare.

"Between kids screaming and me screaming, it sounded like like like a train," she told *The Independent* as neighbours cut up a large pine tree which was blocking the street near her home.

The beige siding of a neighbouring home was plastered with little bits of leaves and behind the shed, another large maple toppled into another yard.

It was a scene repeated dozens of times across town.

Several members of Brooke-Alvinston council were at the fire hall for a public meeting when the storm hit. Councillor Jenny Redick says first the antenna at the fire hall fell, hitting the side of the building. Then, she looked out the window.

"There was a little white Volkswagen and it was moving off the ground and I asked whose car it was and the lady goes, 'That's mine.' I said, 'Well, it's going.'

It's going up and up and up (off the ground), she's like, 'Oh, my God, my car.' And it was just like crazy. I was like, 'Oh, my God, I don't know what's happening. Things are just flying across the parking lot at the fire hall just one after another; it was like, crazy,' she says.

"It was just incredible, like the rain was just sideways. You couldn't see out the window for the rain...The wind was howling and howling."

The meeting was called off and Redick tried to make her way home to make sure everything there was okay.

Every street had at least one tree blocking the way.

She left her car and made her way home only to find the Memorial Garden next door was decimated. A huge willow tree was uprooted and toppled onto River Street. In the garden, two large oak trees were down, several maple trees lost half of their branches.

Neighbours brought a tractor and

pulled some of the larger branches out of the garden.

Jim Alderman of Camlachie was across the street clearing the laneway of his uncle's home. Ken Alderman had called him after hearing about the storms asking him to check on the house. The willow tree had fallen in the drive, and a branch dangled from the power line above Alderman as cut the large branch and hauled it off to the grass with the help of his wife.

Brooke volunteer firefighters were among those out in force with chainsaws helping to clear the road. Trevor Oke joined them after driving through the storm to get home from vacation. "It was scary," he said shaking his head.

Oke stopped for a moment to look at his parent's home on Henry Street. They had about a half dozen large pine trees in the yard. At least three fell - two onto the house. Oke was hopeful the damage wouldn't be too extensive. Within hours, the trees had been

pulled off the roof and lay beside the house.

Across from Oke's home on Elgin Street, volunteers were on the roof at Hope United Church. Several large branches had fallen on the roof of the fellowship hall and a lean-to at the back of the building. Chuck Baresich was using a chainsaw to cut up the largest branches while others used rakes to brush away the small stuff. Pastor Jim Breen said a summer camp would have to move out of the building for its last day because of the damage.

The sounds of chainsaws and generators could be heard constantly, but that was about the only power available. The storm had knocked out electricity to thousands across the region including a large portion of Brooke-Alvinston. The head of Bluewater Power called the damage in Alvinston "traumatic" and the worst to the local power infrastructure she's ever seen.

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