

## CULTURAL MOMENT FOR DECEMBER 2, 2024

### CELEBRATES COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FOLLOWING 1985 TORNADO

Tornadoes are not new to the area.

In the past 130 or so years of recorded history, references to tornadoes have been made in 1902, 1923, 1954, 1957, 1959, 1983, 1985, 1996, 2015... In three of those years - 1957, 1985 and 1996 - the tornadoes all followed a similar path along the 2nd of Luther.

Next year marks the 40th anniversary of the devastating May 31, 1985 tornado. This powerful storm carved a path of destruction from Peel Township through Arthur Township and West Luther, all the way to Barrie. It left behind a trail of damaged farms, homes, and buildings, with one funnel cloud moving southeast through Peel and West Garafraxa toward Belwood.



*Photo of damage from the May 31, 1985 tornado. Photo from the Arthur and Area Historical Society.*

The response in our area was second to none by first responders, police, fire department and paramedics. Neighbours banded together, and an army of volunteers, coordinated by Jack Benham and his runners, Jack Lennox and Murray Langdon, sprang into action. They assessed the needs of affected farms and organized the necessary help and equipment for the following day, with the Arthur Curling Club serving as the headquarters.

The other army of volunteers from area churches and service clubs were coordinated by Muriel Morrison to prepare meals for the workers. Some were bussed into the Community Centre at lunchtime, while some meals were delivered to the sites.

An integral part of the cleanup and later the rebuilding of the lives of so many came from the Mennonite community. A tireless and skilled group who worked continually through the rain and mud to salvage what they could and then started the building process for the victims of this disaster.

Additionally, Bill Smellie, Fred Green, and Duane Shaw loaded their vehicles each morning with coffee, donuts, sandwiches, and cold drinks, delivering them to the OPP, hydro workers, and volunteers who were working around the clock. Many displaced residents found refuge with close friends or family, and John Walsh, another unsung hero, went to the pharmacy late at night to fill prescriptions for those in need.

We are fortunate to live in such a generous and supportive community but keep our eyes to the sky.

*Submitted by Bonny McDougall, Wellington North Cultural Roundtable*