



## STMA members lend a hand after

# TORNADO

STMA Iowa Chapter members work with students from Kirkwood Community College to fill divots. Turf industry business from Iowa and Minnesota have donated seed, sand, compost, mowers, equipment, bases, materials, and anything else that was needed to get the fields back in shape. All photos by Chandler Minner.

By Eric Schroder

In a minute and a half, the history of Parkersburg, IA changed forever May 25. Six people died from injuries sustained when a confirmed "Enhanced Fujita Scale" EF5 (wind speeds of more than 200 mph) tornado struck the town. At least 70 injuries were reported, and two-thirds of the town was turned into rubble. Nearly 200 homes were destroyed, the roof was taken off the high school, the gym was destroyed, and the football scoreboard was found 100 miles away. The tornado was reported to be about a mile wide and was the second deadliest on record in Iowa.

Dr. Dave Minner of Iowa State said bowls of peanuts were still on the bar at the local golf course and a golf club clock was still ticking after the tornado but the front door blew a hole through the back wall of the building.



The visitor half of the scoreboard; the other half ended up 100 miles away in Decorah, IA.



Above: Two thirds of Parkersburg, IA was leveled by an F5 tornado that was nearly a mile wide.



Above: All of the structures, fences, light standards, and press box around the softball and baseball fields were destroyed. The flying debris left gouges and divots nearly a foot in the ground.



Chris Schlosser, head sports field manager for the Iowa Cubs and his assistant, Casey Scheidel, brought their crew to Parkersburg and rebuilt the mound and home plate area. Then they returned home the same day to sandbag as the Des Moines River was in the stadium parking lot and just about to enter their field.

Parkersburg has a long and proud school athletics tradition. The district's high school football program is noted as one of the top in Iowa, and amazingly, boasts four current National Football League players as alumni. This from a school that averages having fewer than 250 students a year! During Friday night games the town shuts down and everyone attends. As soon as it was possible after the storm, a team of more than 50 members from the Iowa chapter of the Sports Turf Managers Association (ISTMA) met in Parkersburg, determined to get the town's athletic fields ready for play as soon as possible.

## Half the football field scoreboard was found more than 100 miles away.

Led by Joe Wagner, city parks manager from Iowa City, and Dr. Dave Minner from Iowa State, the team of volunteers came from as far as 200 miles away and spent 2 days cleaning and rebuilding the football field. Chris Schlosser and his crew from the Iowa Cubs rebuilt the pitching mound and home plate areas of the baseball field.

"Coach Ed Thomas, who normally mows and irrigates the football field himself, lost his home and a neighbor to the tornado," Minner said. "But 4 days after the storm he declared, 'We are going to have a football season'."

Wagner said one of the first things the citizens did after the tragedy was form two rows, shoulder to shoulder, and on their hands and knees went the length of the field and back again, picking debris out of the football field's turf. "The community of Parkersburg is passionate about their football," he said.



Coach Ed Thomas meets with Joe Wagner, Iowa STMA past president, and Dr. Dave Minner. Thomas said having a football season would be an important symbol of rebuilding and gaining some normalcy in Parkersburg.

Minner reported the field did not need re-sodding but instead efforts were made to re-grow the turf in the gouged out areas of the field.

About 6 weeks after the tornado, Coach Thomas said the town's mood was positive. "We are moving forward all the time. We are on target to be ready for the home opener September 5, but without the help of Joe Wagner, Dave Minner and all those Iowa sports turf managers, we wouldn't have had a chance to be playing football," said Thomas.

Each of the four NFL players has been back to Parkersburg several times since the tornado. Casey Wiegmann, 13 years in the league as a center, was an undrafted free agent. Jared DeVries of the Detroit Lions has been in the league 10 years, Green Bay's Aaron Kampman seven years, and Jacksonville center Brad Meester nine years. A fundraiser held in late June netted more than \$250,000 to help rebuild the school's athletic programs, including funds from the NFL, the coach said.

## List of volunteer contributors

The following people and companies donated to the Parkersburg High fields' reconstruction:

- **Redline/Gary Larson**, 50 tons of topdressing and trucking
- **Musco Lighting/Todd Stych**, field lighting and installation
- **Pace Supply/Denny St. Germain**, two pallets of clay bricks/ mound clay/bases for two fields/trucking fees
- **Mike Andresen/Iowa State**, 250 lbs bluegrass blend
- **Floratine/Brent Smith**, Germanx/ Calflex/soil test
- **Commercial Turf/Bryan Wood**, two seeders/tractor and operator
- **Tri State Turf/Steve Cuthforth & Toro/Dale Getz**, CSFM, two mowers/reel & rotary/utility vehicle
- **Joe Wagner**, 250 lbs bluegrass blend
- **Randall Transit**, 17 tons of dirt/trucking fees
- **Hunter Industries/Lynda Wightman**, irrigation controllers
- **Chris Schlosser & Iowa Cubs staff**, rebuilt baseball field ■

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