



This will change outlook for EVs

Comets outlast the in season opener



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## Ice jam causes highest flood in 137 years

BY ERIC FISHER  
Publisher

It will take weeks to estimate the cost of damage caused by the highest flood to hit Wilmington in 137 years.

The City of Wilmington is working with the Will County Emergency Management Agency to survey the damage caused by flooding that began shortly after 10 p.m. Thursday as ice piled up in the main channel, causing the water level to rise nearly three feet through the island parks and mill race.

Will County EMA issued a mass notification message to residents just before midnight, advising them of the rising water levels and the need to evacuate. Water rescue teams were deployed, and 14 individuals were successfully evacuated to a temporary shelter opened by Wilmington ESDA.

The flash flood closed Highway 53 from Water Street to First Street as water surrounded the Van Duyne Motel, portions of Nelson's Furniture and nearby businesses. The river flowed across the highway for approximately 12 hours. By noon Friday the roadway was reopened. Police remained on standby since the island parks were still under water. Both islands remain closed to the public until damage can be assessed and roadways repaired.

"City staff worked around the clock to ensure the safety of residents during this flood event," said Wilmington Mayor Ben Dietz. "I appreciate everyone who stepped up to keep residents safe during this flooding event. Our work isn't finished yet. We are working to fully assess and repair the damage that occurred over the last few days."

The mayor praised first responders for their quick response in preventing loss of life and the city crew for working nonstop to keep the water plant operational even though its pump house flooded.

"For 14 hours I watched from the command center as our people operated with such professionalism," Dietz said. "Our first responders are top-notch. Foremost, they evacuated everyone safely, then had mutual aid and EMA from the county here within 30 minutes as the river continued to rise. The communication between agencies was tremendous. Even though we had been planning for two weeks for



Photo by David Quigley

**THE NORTH ISLAND** was under water Friday morning after an ice jam on the Kankakee River caused the water level to rise along the mill race. Highway 53 through Wilmington was closed late Thursday night until noon Friday while flooding impacted the island parks. The parks remain closed until city officials can assess the damage and repair the roadway.

possible flooding, you don't really know how things will go until it happens. And when it did, I was impressed with everyone's professionalism."

The Will County EMA and Wilmington ESDA had been monitoring the river for days as ice dams formed from the warm water discharge pumps near Bardwell Island upstream over eight miles to Custer Park. About 5 p.m. Thursday it began shifting downstream in the Lakewood Shores area causing pile ups in Wilmington. The ice jams between the city and the Des Plaines River confluence cleared out Saturday.

By 10:45 a.m. Saturday the U.S. Geological Survey Kankakee River gauge upstream of Interstate 55 recorded water levels at 6.89 feet. That was a drop of almost 9 feet from the recorded high of 15.62 feet on Friday evening due to a brief ice jam that formed near I-55. The peak level of water was the 3rd highest level recorded on the

Kankakee River in history and the highest since 1887.

The south island road suffered the most damage as ice piled up near the mill race bridge, damaging a new guard rail and lifting away sections of pavement. Dietz said Monday the city has yet to inspect the emergency water well and building on the South Island.

"We do not know the extent of damage for it. It was flooded and surrounded by ice. Fortunately it's just an emergency well we don't need right now."

Workers at the water treatment plant have been drying out and cleaning the pump house after water backed up into the low-lying area of Widow's Road. Clennon Electric is inspecting all the electronics that operate the pumps. Dietz said backup equipment, including spare pumps, are on site in case they fail to restart when everything

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Photo by Eric Fisher

**ROAD DAMAGE**—The tip of the South Island park suffered the brunt of an ice dam on Thursday as it piled up against a guard rail that was installed last year while lifting up sections of pavement. The parks remain closed to the public.

## Perfect Panthers will need all hands on deck for postseason push

SHAWN LONG  
SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

Teamwork has made dream work for the Reed-Custer Middle School eighth grade basketball team as they recently finished a perfect, 20-0 season and their starting five has played a massive role.

The Panthers earned their 20th consecutive victory with a nailbiting, 39-30 win over Coal City during the Illinois Valley Conference Championship game which was also the team's first IVC title in the history of their program.

RCMS has dismantled teams on the court controlling

them with their starting five and it's not just one or two guys but a team of talented individuals all geared towards their one goal: bringing home a state title.

"Our team is very athletic and it isn't just one guy running the show all the time," said RCMS eighth grade basketball coach Jimmy Matsko.

"We have a very good trio of guards that can handle the ball and shoot well, and our post players know their role as defenders and rebounders.

Matsko preaches the "next man up mentality" and the kids take to it.

"Our team's success is due

to that next man mentality. When one player is struggling, someone else seems to take on that leadership role. It's hard for teams to defend us because they can't just focus on one player. We have several different leading scorers throughout the season."

The Panthers' leading scorers have been Matt Kuban and Kaden Klein who Matsko says have always been that way. Klein picked up 17 while Kuban added nine in the title game.

"Matt and Kaden are special players," added Matsko.

"I teach elementary PE, so I have had the opportunity to

watch them grow since having them in kindergarten. They are always pushing each other and competing in anything that they do, and I think that has shaped them into the athletes they are now. They absolutely refuse to lose, at anything that they do. In middle school, they have had a ton of success in not only basketball, but also baseball and track as well.

Matt is a phenomenal soccer player, and Kaden is a standout football player. So again, just well-rounded athletes.

Along with Kuban and Klein, Matsko relies on Chase

Isaac, Eddie Bryan and Jagger Garcia, who have all played a role in helping the team win.

"Another key player that sometimes is under the radar a little is Chase Isaac. He does so many things well to help us win games. He plays great defense, has a nice shot, and is an excellent passer. So it's hard for teams to key in on just Matthew, or Kaiden, because Chase is very talented too. Our team had a very successful year last year as seventh graders, but what I think has really helped them take a leap to this year is the vast improvement from Eddie Bryan and Jagger Garcia.

Eddie plays hard in the post and helps in the rebounding department, and Jagger has been our go-to guard off the bench who can give great minutes and knock down some key shots when we need him.

He also credits Trent Boudreau who has held the fort down from the post all season long.

"Our other post player, Trent Boudreau, also knows his role and has been a great help

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