

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

KANSASCITY.COM



TAMMY LJUNGBLAD tjungblad@kcstar.com

A reported tornado tore through Ottawa on Monday night, toppling power lines and trees, leaving thousands in the dark and causing structural damage around the Franklin County town.

Tornado roars through Ottawa, Kansas, leaving wide damage

BY ERIC ADLER AND TAMMY LJUNGBLAD AND JUDY THOMAS

OTTAWA, KANSAS

Randy and Gwen McCurdy stood on their porch off Main Street on Monday night in Ottawa, Kansas, scanning the sky for signs of the storm.

Then the sirens sounded. "There was no rain," said Randy McCurdy, 70. But then it descended. In sheets. "You couldn't see the other side of the street."

Moments later, they retreated to their basement as the tornado tore through southern Ottawa.

"You could hear the roar," he said.

By Tuesday morning, the damage stretched for blocks.

A tornado was reported to have struck Ottawa, about an hour southwest of Kansas City, in Franklin County, shortly after 7:30 p.m., toppling power lines and trees, leaving much of the city without electricity and causing widespread structural damage.

The tornado continued east,

where it was observed in Paola, Kansas, around 8 p.m., according to a post from the National Weather Service.

A National Weather Service meteorologist confirmed by phone Monday night that at least two tornadoes moved through northeastern Kansas. One stemmed from a storm in Johnson and Miami counties. The other came from a storm in Linn and Bates counties.

PATH OF THE STORM IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

The National Weather Service confirmed a tornado near

Ottawa at 7:38 p.m., moving west to east. Emergency radio traffic described parts of the city as impassable, with "power lines down all over."

The hardest-hit area appeared to run along Main Street between 15th and 23rd streets, with particularly heavy damage reported near 17th Street.

That's where the McCurdys found devastation.

The auto shop their family has owned for 45 years, at Main and 17th streets, was in ruins — its roof torn off, cinder blocks

SEE TORNADO, 2A

REALITY CHECK

State investigation details developer ties near Kansas City

BY KACEN BAYLESS kbayless@kcstar.com

A Missouri State Auditor's Office investigation into a tiny village near Kansas City found credible conflicts of interest between the village's elected board and a prominent developer, marking the latest findings in a scandal that resulted in the arrests of the town's elected officials.

An investigative report released Monday by state Auditor Scott Fitzpatrick, a Republican, mirrored a 2023 investigation by The Star into River Bend, a small village in northern Jackson County.

Every member of the village's elected board was connected professionally or through family to Jack Mitchell, an influential marijuana businessman who pursued a weed-based entertainment district called the Smokey River Entertainment District, The Star previously revealed.

"Our review found concerns about trustee relationships with a developer are credible, and the village did incur significant expenses related to the development project," the report from Fitzpatrick's office concluded, acknowledging that Mitchell has since scrapped the project and the elected officials at the center of the controversy had been arrested.

The report marks the culmination of a yearslong saga that upended the tiny village north of the Missouri River. Home to various industrial businesses, the sparsely populated village has long confounded local and state officials and business owners.

River Bend is classified as a village — instead of a city or other municipality — under

SEE INVESTIGATION, 2A

Inspired by mom, KC woman pedals for brain cancer research

BY LAURA BAUER LBauer@kcstar.com

Growing up in the Kansas City area, Mary Gerend would watch her mom dedicate her professional life to helping kids and young mothers as a social worker.

"She'll literally fight, until the end, for a cause that she believes is worthy," said Gerend. "It's always an inspiration. ... She just really, really wants to help our communities and, you know, be a villager."

Now, the 21-year-old junior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln who is studying psychology, finds herself following her mother's lead. For her mom and other patients and their families who are dealing with cancer.

SEE CANCER, 4A



Courtesy of GoFundMe, Gerend family

Mary Gerend, right, is spending the month of April biking 300 miles to raise money for Head for the Cure Foundation, an organization which began in Kansas City. Gerend's mom, Amy, was diagnosed with Glioblastoma, a Stage 4 brain tumor, roughly 16 months ago.

How data center opponents won Independence on election night

BY ILANA AROUGHETI iarougheti@kcstar.com

When Kevin King and Jackie Dorman found out that they would join Independence's next class of city leaders — as mayor and City Council member, respectively — many of their strongest supporters were all in the same room. It was lined with "No Data Centers" posters.

With plans for a \$150 billion hyperscale data center looming over their city, Independence residents — including many who otherwise haven't engaged much in local politics — had been paying more attention to City Hall in recent months. And in a lot of ways, they didn't like what they saw. As the mayoral and council

elections approached, some residents warned that candidates' stances on the data center would be key to their vote. They made it clear that they were ready for new leaders to represent them.

Those voters stuck to their word at the polls last week, ousting two City Council members who had voted for tax breaks for the data center. Instead, voters opted for at least two political newcomers who had criticized aspects of the project on the campaign trail.

Stop The AI Data Center, the local group that rallied many of these voters, gathered with supporters in downtown Independence to watch election results come in, soon cele-

SEE ELECTION, 6A



We're dedicated to delivering the journalism you rely on. Discover the stories that matter to you inside. Subscribers, explore more stories and features like puzzles and games at kansascity.com/edition.

FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE QUESTIONS, CALL US AT: 877-962-7827

OR REACH US ONLINE AT: kansascity.com/customer-service

