

The Uxbridge Cosmos – Special Early Edition – Tuesday, May 24, 2022

On Saturday, May 21, a category EF-2 tornado touched down in the centre of the Township of Uxbridge, destroying homes, businesses, a church, and hundreds of trees. Electricity was out throughout much of the township, and as such, internet connectivity was lost to almost every resident in Uxbridge. News of the just-invoked state of emergency, where to shelter, and other vital information was only transmissible through word-of-mouth and the local radio station – but no one could listen to a radio.

On May 22, less than 24 hours after the storm, township officials approached the *Uxbridge Cosmos* and asked its publisher whether it was possible to publish that week's newspaper earlier than normal, as the newspaper was the only media through which the township could communicate its urgently-needed information. The township also offered to assist with the distribution of the newspaper by gathering volunteers (the paper is normally delivered via Canada Post).

After making appropriate arrangements with printers, reporters, graphic designers and advertisers, the publisher was able to confirm with the municipality that it would be possible to create, print and distribute the newspaper on the Monday and Tuesday, and the paper could be delivered, by hand, on Tuesday evening (the paper normally "hits the streets" on Wednesday, after printing, and is dated Thursday of each week).

Because there was no electricity at the *Cosmos's* office, which is located mere metres away from the path the tornado took, the publisher was able to move the newsroom to the barn operated by her husband's family. The barn, also without electricity, was being serviced by a generator, and the publisher was able to tap into that electricity and set up her computer, an extra monitor, and phone charging implements in order to produce the newspaper.

One reporter had to ask the local McDonald's restaurant (also operating on a generator) if he could set up in the restaurant to write and file his stories – they fortunately agreed.

In less than 48 hours, a team of two photographers, one reporter, one graphic designer, and one editor/layout designer/newsroom coordinator/publisher was able to create a 12-page newspaper. The special edition was sent to the printer's, and by the time the publisher drove to collect 8,800 copies of the paper, the edition was ready. It was quickly driven back to Uxbridge, and almost 50 volunteers were waiting at a central location, ready to hand deliver copies of the paper. The Scouts, the Rotary Club, Optimists, individuals, township staff (including the mayor and his daughter) all pitched in and ventured out on foot (as many streets were still impassable because of fallen trees and electrical wires) to ensure the entire downtown core of both businesses and residences all received a newspaper. The newspaper publisher and one reporter also delivered several hundred copies.

In the days and weeks following the tornado and the delivery of this "special edition", dozens of residents expressed their gratitude for having received the newspaper, saying they had needed the information, and that it was something that connected them when everything else that had happened left them feeling disconnected.

The publisher of the *Cosmos*, and her team, all went to bed on the night of May 24 feeling exhausted, satisfied and humbled by all those who had come together to help make sure that friends and neighbours were brought together in a desperate time of fear and need.