

Oregon recovers from

THE FLOOD OF 1996

By Sherry Rainey
Community Editor

"It could have been worse."
Survivors across the Mohawk Valley repeated these words this weekend, as they dried out valuables, hosed down garages and wiped up mud from the Flood of '96.

Jane Hartman, surrounded by family, began the tedious process on Saturday of cleaning up the mess that the raging Mohawk River left behind.

Her garage, which had been converted into a seamstress' paradise, now looked like a room where the bathtub had overflowed three feet, while children were making mud pies.

One hundred yards of material, gone. An electronic sewing machine, gone. A hand-crafted quilting table, gone.

But Hartman's husband, daughter, son, sisters-in-law and family friends laughed anyway, as they sorted through ceramics, family heirlooms and sewing projects, which had been put out into the blessed sun to dry.

Hartman's grandson brought over pictures of his dad.

"These still look good, Grandma," he said. "If you want them, you can have them," she said.

"Thank you, but are you sure you don't want them?"

"I'm sure. I dread going through that stuff — pictures. I'm going to do that last."

This bittersweet moment, realizing what was saved, but also what was lost, was one moment in the repetitive cycle of Hartman's day — deciding what to save and what to throw away.

About seven miles down the Mohawk, Fred Mentzee took stock of his garage where his fully restored '57 Chevrolet Belair convertible used to be.

"It's in a trailer back to the body shop," said Mentzee, owner of F.M. Sheet Metal, a company that has worked on several buildings at the University.

BY THE NUMBERS

- At least \$400 million in uninsured property damage.
- More than 50 reported injuries.
- About 22,000 people were evacuated.
- 1,025 people housed at Red Cross shelters.
- 420,000 sandbags dispensed.

The river water, which reached 18 inches in his garage, pushed over several salt bags that caved in the door of the '57.

"But it can be restored again," he said with a light-hearted grin.

Mentzee had the help of his son, friends and employees, who carefully removed the half inch of river silt from the equipment and car parts Mentzee had stored in the garage.

Fortunately for Hartman, Mentzee and other residents north of Springfield, the additional 5 inches of rain forecast for last Thursday never came, and rivers across Oregon have slowly receded.

Besides the friends, family and employees, assistance has come in many forms to the survivors of the flood.

Locally, the Lane County Waste Management Division has waived disposal fees for flood-damaged household items from now until Feb. 24. Fees will be waived only for items such as bedding, mattresses, clothing, furniture, draperies, carpeting and similar items.

At the national level, federal officials pledged millions of dollars in relief to flood-ravaged Oregon on Saturday.

The weather is also aiding the survivors by drying the mud that surrounds their homes. Fair skies and moderate temperatures are expected to continue until Friday, and Hartman and Mentzee will both be grateful.

"I felt like I was handicapped [during the flood and rain]," Hartman said, "because I couldn't come out here and do anything."

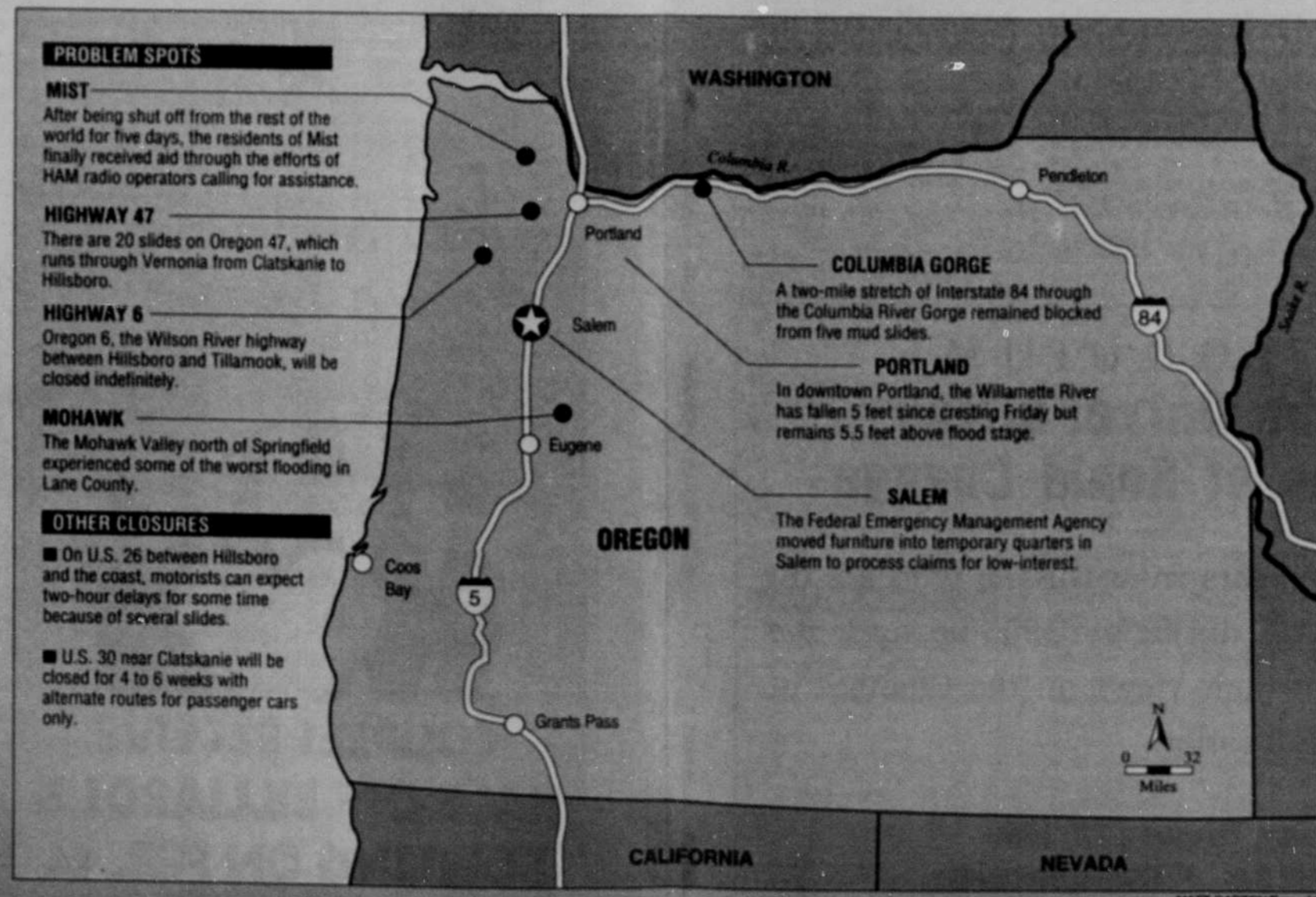


ANDREW BRACKENSGICK/Emerald



MATHEW STIFFLE/Emerald

On Wednesday, as the river levels began to rise, Rose Marie Siegle (below) helped Garry Gordon fill sandbags to protect his home. One of the hardest hit areas was the Mohawk River Valley (left), where the river swallowed many vehicles that were not taken to higher ground. By Thursday the waters had not receded enough to allow access to these vans that were parked close to Marcola Road. In the town of Marcola (bottom left), homes were turned into islands accessible only by boats because of floodwaters that remained until Thursday evening.



MATT GARTON/Emerald

VICTIMS

■ Four people in Oregon have died from the high waters including a 9-year-old girl, who drowned in a culvert in Scio; an 84-year-old woman, who died in a car crash near Corvallis; and a 45-year-old man, who drowned after driving into high water near Brownsville.

■ Three people are missing in Oregon, including a 62-year-old woman whose home was swept into the Sandy River and a 62-year-old woman whose car was found submerged at her home near Albany.

■ An Oregon Department of Transportation worker helping to clean up a flood-caused slide on U.S. Highway 30 east of Rainier was critically injured early Monday when he was struck by a car, state police said.

Glen Allen Holsti, 43, was flown to Oregon State Health Sciences University in Portland with head, spine and leg injuries. Holsti was the first casualty of the massive highway cleanup effort in Oregon.

ROAD CLOSURES

■ At least 500 Oregon roads were closed, including both major highways out of Portland. Interstate 5 between Portland and Seattle was reopened Saturday after being closed for two days by a mudslide and high water. Interstate 84 was closed for the fifth day, but crews hoped to have one lane open by Monday.

■ Mist, Ore., was cut off for days by high water and mudslides. They ran out of food, laundry and patience, waiting for someone to remember them. Up to 200 homes along the Nehalem River, which runs past Mist, were destroyed or badly damaged by the flood. Some homes were still flooded Sunday.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

■ A state of emergency was declared in 18 counties including Benton, Clackamas, Clatsop, Columbia, Hood River, Lane, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Sherman, Tillamook, Umatilla, Union, Wasco, Washington and Yamhill, also the Warm Springs Reservation.

FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

■ A disaster flood office opened Monday in Salem to serve as a clearing-house for flood recovery operations. The office will house state and federal agencies, and will brief public agencies on applying for disaster relief assistance. To apply for assistance, call (800) 462-9029.

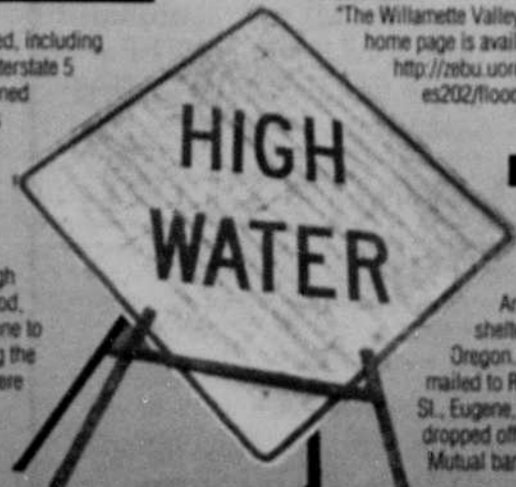
ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

■ A flood home page on the World Wide Web has been created by University physics professor Greg Bothun. The page has been in service since last Thursday, and offers current information including flood warnings, river levels, a comparison with the '64 flood and photos of the devastation.

"The Willamette Valley Flood of 1996" home page is available at <http://zebu.uoregon.edu/1996/es202/flood.html>

TO HELP

■ More than 2,000 victims are still living in American Red Cross shelters throughout Oregon. Donations can be mailed to Red Cross, 150 E. 18th St., Eugene, Oregon, 97401, or dropped off at any Washington Mutual bank branch.



STEVEN ASBURY, DESIGN DIRECTOR



ANDREW BRACKENSGICK/Emerald