



# The Baker County Press

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## Snow load crushes historic building

BY KERRY McQUISTEN  
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On Sunday morning at 8:10 a.m., a multi-agency response was called into action as the old two-story Crabill Building, constructed in 1889, crumbled under a heavy snow load.

The building, which stands at 1916 Main Street, is owned by Barbara Sidway and husband, Dwight.

Sidway said the Baker City Fire Department's "response was virtually immediate, perhaps three minutes at most."

She added, "What wonderful resources we are blessed with in our city."

The cook at the Geiser Grand called 911 when the collapse happened.

Sidway recounts her own experience:

"I was at my desk in my office in the lower level ... Dwight was on the second floor. Our maintenance guy was actually on our roof. None of us felt or heard anything in the building! Guests out in the parking lot and out for a morning stroll witnessed it, and gestured wildly and yelled to get the cook's attention.

"He looked outside, saw the bricks in the street and thought it was our building. He called 911 and got the remainder of the staff all excited. I only learned anything was up when I overheard a waitress in a panicked voice declare, 'The roof collapsed.'

"I headed outside to see what was up, and saw the first of many firetrucks and ambulances coming down Resort Street.

"As I looked at the debris field, it was hard to process what I was seeing; the mind doesn't want to believe what seems not possible. Then my mind moved toward whether anyone was injured, so it was great to see the first responders already in action.

"What an enormous relief that no one was hurt or even hit! How fortunate that was; a team of three had been doing sidewalk snow and ice removal just 20 minutes before and

would surely have been hurt."

According to Baker City Fire Department (BCFD) Chief Tom Wills, "The majority of the collapse occurred on the second floor towards the back of the building. Firefighters quickly evacuated the buildings on both sides of the collapse, which included guests and staff of the Geiser Grand Hotel. The Fire Department and the Police Department established a 'Unified Command' and managed the incident throughout the day with support from Baker Rural Fire Department, Cascade Natural Gas, OTEC and Baker Sanitary. A Structural Engineer arrived and inspected the damage with firefighters."

Sidway said Chief Wills took command within the hour. Brass from the Baker City Police Department (BCPD) did not respond to the incident. BCPD Sgt. Wayne Chastain and Patrol Officer Shannon Regan were on site.

BCFD Engine 2431, Truck 2451, Rescue 2471, Ambulance's 2422, 2420, and Command 2472 were brought to the location.

Sidway said, "As I moved outside to get the larger view of what happened, I talked to guests in the parking lot who wanted to share what they witnessed. They said they'd never heard or seen anything like it, and would never forget it. No pre-quel or warning sounds or sights, just a sudden crash. The guests were so kind and compassionate."

The BCFD announced that an evacuation was needed. Surrounding streets were cordoned off.

Sidway said, "We asked our guests to check out early, apologized to them for the inconvenience and gave every one a gift certificate for a future stay. We explained to guests breakfasting in the Café that we couldn't fill their orders and sent them out to Lone Pine and Sweet Wife. We sent all staff home."



Kerry McQuisten / The Baker County Press

An overload of heavy, wet snow brought down the roof of the building at 1916 Main Street beside the historic Geiser Grand Hotel, sending debris toppling down onto Resort Street.



Kerry McQuisten / The Baker County Press

Jason Bybee of the Baker City Fire Department helps guard the area for the public's safety.

She said, "Then we continued on with process of shutting down a business. I was in my office calling down guests with reservations for that night, when suddenly I was in total

darkness; the power was shut off! Had I known they would do that, I would have in a proper manner shut down the dozens of electrical systems that we have here in the building. We were at risk of losing our food in our large walk-



Kerry McQuisten / The Baker County Press

Responders help evacuate the parking lot of the Geiser Grand in slushy, slick conditions.

in coolers and freezers. We explained that to the authorities. The City called out Hanley Engineering to look at the buildings and found that really the Hotel was not involved, and was not in danger of collapse. An officer made

the kind and wise decision to turn power back on to the Hotel. Still that sudden shut down was the most difficult part of the evacuation."

SEE COLLAPSE PAGE 9

## 5J: Parents talk about 5-day week

BY SAMANTHA O'CONNOR  
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Wednesday, February 1, the Baker School District Board held their meeting that had been postponed in January due to weather conditions.

The meeting began with presentations.

From the Baker Technical Institute, Kaeli Flanagan was presented as the "Promise of Baker Student of the Month." The Baker City Lions Club was presented with the Business of the Quarter.

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## Hungry wildlife a topic at County

BY TODD ARRIOLA  
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The Baker County Board of Commissioners held a work session on Wednesday, February 8, 2017, 9 a.m., which included, among other discussions, an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) update from Baker District Wildlife Biologist Brian Ratliff and Assistant Wildlife Biologist Justin Primus.

Present from the Board were Chair Bill Harvey, Commissioners Mark Bennett and Bruce Nichols, and Executive Assistant Heidi Martin. Attendance also included Baker County Sheriff's Department Lieutenant Warren Thompson, and Wanda Ballard.

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Friday Mostly cloudy with a chance for rain/snow showers. Highs near 40. Chance of precipitation is 40%. Friday Night: Light snow showers.

Saturday Mostly sunny and seasonable. Highs in the mid 30s. Saturday Night: Partly cloudy and seasonably chilly. Lows in the mid teens.

Sunday Mostly sunny and seasonable. Highs in the mid 30s. Sunday Night: Partly cloudy. Lows near 20.

Your weekend weather forecast for Baker County.



Our forecast made possible by this generous sponsor:



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