

Tennessee State Faring Well, Despite Flooding

Date: Wednesday, May 12, 2010

By:

When flood waters rushed onto the campus of Tennessee State University in Nashville on May 2, one of the biggest victims was the college's Department of Agricultural Sciences.

Several of the research animals were killed in the flood, and a professor who went to the campus that Sunday morning to check on the animals had to be rescued.

"The water rose much faster than anyone anticipated," said Richard Browning, a professor in agricultural sciences. He was trying to get the goats – about 200 of them – and some dogs to higher ground.

"Before I knew it, the water was over my head. I got on top of some hay with two of the department's dogs. I had actually gone out into the water to try and rescue them," Browning told BlackAmericaWeb.com.

It was TSU President Melvin Johnson and a graduate student who got a boat and came out to rescue the professor.

Browning was taken to the hospital on Sunday, but on Tuesday, he was back at the farm taking care of the animals.

"I've been at Tennessee State since 1994, and I've never seen anything like this," Browning said. "I hope we never see anything like it again."

The TSU farm is nestled on the edge of campus, right next to the Cumberland River. It's on 90 acres, just off of Ed Temple Boulevard.

About 13 inches of rain fell in middle Tennessee in the first weekend in May, causing the Cumberland River to spill out of its banks. Water flooded several residential communities, businesses and tourist attractions. At least 20 people were killed by the flood, and there are reports of some still missing. Damage from the flood in Nashville is expected to top \$1 billion.

The floods came during the final exam period at the historically black land grant institution. Some exams had to be relocated to other buildings because of flood damage, but all campus activities were able to proceed in spite of the flood and the recovery, said Cheryl Bates-Lee, assistant vice president for marketing and public affairs.

"Campus did not shut down," Bates-Lee told BlackAmericaWeb.com.

Now that the spring semester has ended and the university has had its commencement, preparation is underway for summer school and to assist the community in dealing with the aftermath of the flood, she said.

"We haven't received a dollar amount on the damage," said Bates-Lee. "We were able to continue finals without major disruptions, but we had to make some adjustments."

TSU did not appear to be hit quite as hard as some other popular locations in the Music City.

Four to six feet of water flooded the Grand Ole Opry's celebrated stage, an uninvited guest at the spot graced normally by Garth Brooks, Loretta Lynn and Vince Gill.

The famous country music show was forced to move from its normal location five miles northeast of downtown to the War Memorial Auditorium near the state Capitol. But the show went on - as it has since 1925.

At the posh Gaylord Opryland Resort on Monday, up to 10 feet of water stood amid neatly arranged tables with linen tablecloths still sitting majestically on them. Nine acres of atriums were full of water.

Across the flooded street, a life-size Elvis statue, missing his guitar, was spotted on its back in the parking lot of the Wax Museum of the Stars.

TSU President Nelson on Thursday sent out a letter detailing some of the ways TSU is helping those affected by the flood.

“Plans are being executed by the University related to short term emergency housing assistance for employees, fund raising through the American Red Cross, and community support through our Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement,” Nelson said.

“Also, available to those affected are the services of the TSU Counseling Center in the Queen Washington Health Center,” he said.

He asked that everyone in the university limit their water use to drinking, cooking, hand washing and other critical uses until further notice.

About 10 buildings on the campus, including the library, the Performing Arts Center and several residence halls received some flooding.

The water in these buildings has been removed, and carpet cleaning and replacement of ceiling tile is now in progress, university officials said.

The damage estimates in the agricultural sciences department are not in yet, but Browning was optimistic about the future of the program.

TSU offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees in agricultural sciences.

“We’ll continue to have a strong program. Our research will go on,” Browning said. “We lost animals, but we have babies waiting to be born right now.”

Associated Press contributed to this report.



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