

The Dwyer family of Farmington poses on what's left of the kids' swingset in the back yard. Several of the 40-foot spruce trees lining the family's back yard on Larkspur were ruined in last week's storm, which carried 75 mph winds. Pictured are dad Tim, daughters Teresa and Michelle and mom Marie.

Blown in the wind

Area trees, wires come tumbling down during storms

By Casey Hane
staff writer

Tim and Marie Dwyer's back yard in Farmington was cozy, secluded by a natural wall of 40-foot blue spruce trees which had complemented the house for some 30 years.

That wall came tumbling down last week during storms which carried 75 mph winds through Southeast Michigan, knocking out power to some 450,000 homes, including the Dwyer's.

"I think it might have been some kinds of small twister," said Tim Dwyer. "It wasn't just a wind storm."

Dwyer speculated a small twister could have struck nearby Meadowlark where a large tree fell across part of the road, moved northeast to the Dwyer's back yard on Larkspur where two trees were downed and another three uprooted, and then north to a neighbor's house where the roof was damaged.

To the east on Meadowlark, another resident had already cut up a downed tree in the front yard Friday morning.

OF THE DWYER'S nine trees, five are gone and the couple says they will likely have to remove the others from their southside home. They continue to battle with their insurance carrier for reimbursement, which had not been approved as of Friday.

Marie Dwyer was watching the storm out a back window at about 9:30 p.m. Wednesday when she saw one tree come toppling down on top of her daughters' swingset.

"It just came down real softly — just floated down," she said. The family of four retired to the basement for the next hour until the winds died down.

Ironically, the Dwyers put their home up for sale three weeks ago with the intention of building a new one. "We were advertising a nice, private back yard," Tim Dwyer said. "Now it will be an open one."

Meanwhile, they are lucky to have a built-in gas space heater in their family room to keep them warm until Detroit Edison restores

power. Only able to reach an Edison recording, Marie said she was told power could be restored by Friday, but "secluded pockets" of customers may have to wait until Monday. The family is eating out, or bringing carryout food home, where everything from the electric stove to the telephone answering machine and doorbell are out of commission.

THE STORM affected others in the Farmington area as well.

Students at Gill and Flanders elementary schools, Fairview Early Childhood Center, Power and Warner middle schools and Farmington Community School all got the day off Thursday, due to power outages, said Don Cowan, director of building and student services for the district. Elementary buildings only had a half-day of school scheduled for teacher/parent conferences and schools closed down Friday for spring break.

In the city of Farmington, several fallen trees and arcing wires were reported to police, including various problems on Freedom Road, Farmington Road, Orchard Lake Road, and on Liberty, where a tree fell on a car.

In Farmington Hills, wires were reported down, and trees uprooted throughout the area, including a large one which closed Drake Road between 13 and 14 Mile.

Between the hours of 8:51 p.m. Wednesday and until early Friday morning, fire officials had logged 41 cases of downed or arcing wires, two traffic hazards, two alarm problems, one tree on a house and one tree fire due to the storm.

Deputy fire Chief Peter Baldwin said his department was still handling downed wire problems Friday.

"The damage was not as great as I anticipated with those winds," said public works director Dan Rooney. "Our crews worked well past midnight with the fire department."

Rooney said his crews planned to handle most tree problems by Friday.

Staff writer Joanne Maliszewski contributed to this story.



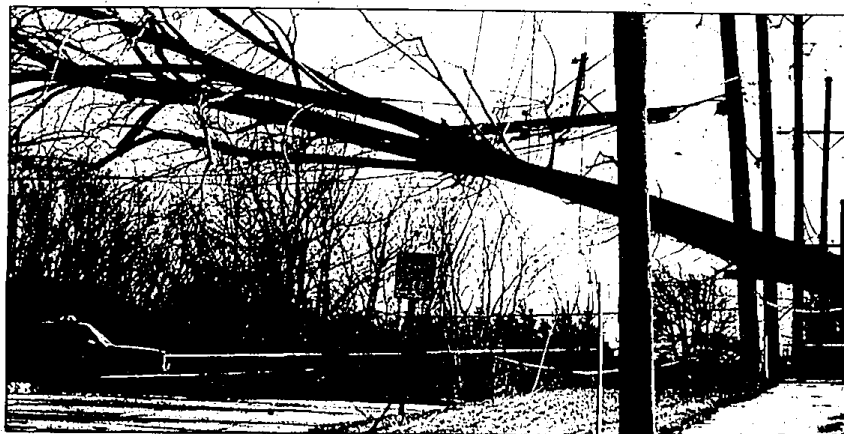
photos by SHARON LeMIEUX/staff photographer

One of the downed trees in the Dwyer's back yard in Farmington fell on the family's shed. The storm destroyed five of the nine 30-year-old blue spruce trees.

Tim Dwyer said the rest will likely have to be taken down as well.



Farmington Public Schools maintenance employee Nancy Hankins takes the garbage out at East Middle School Wednesday night, getting drenched due to the storm which hit the area about 9 p.m.



SHARON LeMIEUX/staff photographer

A tree rests on electrical wires Thursday across Drake Road near 13 Mile, prompting officials to close the Farmington Hills road for safety reasons.