

Tin-and-wood barn at Styer collapses under weight of snow

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middletown

No one was injured in the collapse.

All the snow and the passage of time have claimed a corrugated tin and wood storage building at the township-owned Styer property in Middletown.

The weight of snow apparently collapsed the roof of the building, described as "an old pole barn," sometime early Friday morning, said Debbie Verdini, manager of a farm store on the property. No one was injured, she said.

"The contractor who plows our parking lot discovered it about 6 a.m. (Friday) when he came to finish the plowing," said Verdini. "He had stored his equipment in there and somehow managed to get it out."

The building is corrugated tin attached to wooden trusses and is located right behind the farm store. On Friday afternoon, the storage building was just a mangled heap of snow and tin on top of whatever was stored in the building. Large twisted sections of tin stuck out the side, blowing occasionally in the wind.

Verdini said thousands of dollars worth of firewood had been stored in the building. It was going to be put out for sale soon, she added.

"With all the power outages and people without heat, we had sold out of firewood," said Verdini. "I'm just glad no one was near the building when it collapsed."

Two businesses are run from the property under agreements with the township. Dave Barberides runs the farm store, and Mike and Karen Field run a business called Styer Orchard Inc., a pick-your-own fruit and farm tours operation.

Barberides said he has insurance, which should cover replacement of the building that he thought was about 30 years old.

"I wasn't expecting this," he said of the collapse. "It was a total surprise because the roof was slanted, but I guess the snow was just too much, and the age of the building didn't help. We had mostly that firewood and apple bins stored in there, nothing of any great value. I've contacted our insurance company and they'll send someone out. Then we'll talk to the township and see what can be done. It would be nice to have a replacement."

Mike Field had been using a small part of the collapsed building to store frost cloths and some other equipment. Frost cloths are used to cover crops and protect them from frost.

"We didn't have anything tremendously valuable in there, but there was \$2,000 to \$3,000 worth of those cloths," Field said. "We'll have to see if we get in there when it's safe to try and salvage them and the other stuff."

Field, who lives on the property with Karen and two of their children, said he's been talking to township officials for years about work that needs to be done on several buildings on the property.

"They're doing some work on our house and to a garage now, but there is a lot more that needs done," said Mike Field. "There is a dam on a pond here we've told the township needs repairs but it doesn't get done. It's no secret a lot of the buildings need repairs, but year after year there is not much of a response."

Middletown acquired the 107-acre property from the Styer family in 1999.

"These are very old buildings and the Styer family didn't maintain things like most people would," said by Ray Stepnoski, who has been township manager for less than two years. "Are there issues on the Styer property? Yes, and we're addressing them where we can but we don't have endless cash."

Stepnoski said he didn't regard the loss of the storage building as catastrophic.

"This was just an old pole barn and I don't think it was that unexpected it met its demise," he said. "The question is whether it even should be rebuilt."

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