

New Grafton mayor describes recent top 10 flooding as "baptism by fire"

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
May 10 2017 6:25 AM



GRAFTON - The waters are finally receding in Grafton, and while the flood was one of the top 10 in the village's memory, the after effects are not so bad, newly-sworn-in Grafton Mayor Rick Eberlin said.

Eberlin was officially made Mayor of Grafton last Tuesday, May 2, after being elected in the April 4, 2017, elections. He was the favored candidate of outgoing Grafton Mayor Tom Thompson, who Eberlin said has been instrumental in the current Grafton flooding situation. As the water falls from a crest of above 29 feet at the end of last week to 26.3 feet Tuesday morning, Eberlin said he (and the rest of Grafton) is now focused on part two of the typical flooding routine - cleaning the village and putting everything back into the previously-evacuated businesses.

"Things are looking good," Eberlin said Tuesday morning. "It's fallen three feet already. By the weekend, we may be able to get through Grafton."

As the water recedes, however, it is leaving behind large patches of mud, gunk and even large logs of driftwood. Eberlin said volunteers from the city as well as a crew from Illinois American Water led by Dan Ebbing were working tirelessly to clean the streets in preparation for what Eberlin hopes will be a very successful weekend for the people of Grafton and its tourists.

"Volunteers have been helping people move out and back in," Eberlin said. "The Grafton Chamber of Commerce had a meeting last night, and said they were half done. It's pretty exciting to see everyone pull together and see the town back open again."

He also credited the Grafton Police Department for "going above and beyond," and working extra hours to ensure the streets of Grafton could stay opened for travelers. In order for the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) to allow Grafton's main intersections to remain available without barricades, the village had to ensure the intersections had a police officer stationed at them for 24 hours a day.

This entire situation has been what Eberlin has described as "baptism by fire" for his first week as the village's chief administrator. While he has lived in Grafton for decades, Eberlin said the flooding situation was "very enlightening."

"I have been able to reach out and get advice, and have been fielding 20-25 calls a day of suggestions of what to do, what not to do and offers to help," he said. "It has been a very enlightening experience to say the least."

While the flood may have been damaging and a massive inconvenience to Grafton businesses, Eberlin said it is nothing the village has not previously experienced. He said the people of Grafton have nearly become "experts" in dealing with the floods, adding this year he saw the people working together, along with the assistance of outside volunteers in a much more concentrated effort than in previous years.

The deluge is leaving behind a few problems, however, Eberlin said. Ameren Illinois recently fixed a gas leak caused by the incoming water, his River Rat Catfish Classic fishing tournament has been postponed to a date to be announced, instead of being held on May 20-21, and Grafton's Music in the Park event will still occur - just not in Grove Memorial Park.

Instead of being held in Grove Memorial Park, Eberlin said Music in the Park will spend at least the first two weeks of June being held at Red Hawk Park, instead, with later weeks being held at Grove Memorial Park - weather-permitting.

"It will be a good thing for Red Hawk Park," Eberlin said. "It's a good place up there."

Grove Memorial Park, like many places in Grafton, could use that time to dry and undergo some minor repairs. Other businesses like Knotty by Nature and the Loading Dock could be opened by this weekend, Eberlin said, and the wineries are open as well.

Even the Hawg Pit, which is usually the first business in Grafton to close during floods, is looking to be open in the near future. Eberlin said Hawg Pit owner Steve Kasten is cleaning and bleaching his restaurant and bar currently as he prepares to move everything back into the place. Eberlin said the Hawg Pit will open following cleanup and proper inspection following flooding.

"People are ready to put this one behind them and move forward," Eberlin said.