

## Before storm hit Mayfield, Kentucky, it tore roof off Arkansas nursing home 100 miles away

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MONETTE, Arkansas — The nursing home residents huddled together on the south end of the building and tried to hold on to their pillows while they sang hymns.

It was what the nurses, who hovered over the residents as human shields from the storm debris, suggested they do to stay calm.

They sang "When We All Get to Heaven" and "Jesus Loves Me" and "One Day at a Time" as the wind was ripping their building apart, grabbing metal and bending it around tree branches, pulverizing concrete into rocks.

One 94-year-old resident died in the severe storms that destroyed the Monette Manor nursing home, a single-story brick building in the small northeastern Arkansas town.

Before officially describing the Friday evening storm as a tornado, the National Weather Service will have to assess more of the devastation. Early assessments suggest the storm is a record-breaking tornado that hit the ground around Monette and plowed a 250-mile path

through Missouri, Tennessee and into southwest Kentucky.

"If it is one length, it will be the longest ever recorded," said NWS meteorologist Samantha Brown.

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**More:**[A massive tornado ripped through Kentucky for more than 200 miles. Here's its path.](#)

The storm hit the Monette nursing home around 8:15 p.m., tearing off the roof.

"It went right through us just like we were paper," said Barbara Richards, who was one of the nurses singing hymns with the residents.

The deadly storms continued to rip through the South and Midwest in a tear overnight Friday to Saturday, hitting a candle factory in southwestern Kentucky and an Amazon facility in Illinois, outside of St. Louis. Kentucky officials [believe dozens have died.](#)



Memphis sustained some damage in the storms, which hit around midnight, but the NWS is still examining the extent, Brown said. The Bluff City broke a 100-year-old high-temperature record, hitting 80 degrees Friday before temperatures plummeted to a more typical December as a cold front moved through. At the worst point, 54,000 people were without power, Memphis Light, Gas and Water reported.



"We usually have the deadliest tornadoes around this time, because they're usually nocturnal," Brown said.

**More:**[Tornado destroys nursing home in Monette, Arkansas, as storms rip through](#)

In Monette, a tight-knit farming community of 1,600, the man who died is a friend of the city's mayor, Bob Blankenship. On top of the trained officials who helped, volunteer workers have started clearing the roads of trees with farm equipment, he said.

People at the nursing home were prepared for the possibility of the storm. In Craighead County, where Monette is located, dealing with storms is part of the living and the leadership jobs.

In just the first three years of Marvin Day's term as county judge, chief executive of the county, two other tornadoes have struck, one at an atypically empty Jonesboro mall at the start of the pandemic when many businesses were closed, and another hit shortly after.

Tornadoes have also hit the area in 1968 and 1973.



The area has potential for tornadoes, but the community pulls together to care for one another, Day said.

**Power:Map: Check power outages in Memphis after storms rolled through area overnight**

“We’re doing okay county-wide. We’ve got lots of volunteers and lots of people out seeing what they can do to help their neighbors,” Day said. “There’s not anything at this point on a large scale that we need. Just your prayers.”



Day said the coroner had confirmed one death so far.

The residents at the nursing home who aren’t still being treated for injuries at the hospital were relocated to other nursing homes in the area, said Rachel Bunch, the executive director for the Arkansas Health Care Association. Bunch said another facility, Quail Run Rehabilitation and Nursing Home, evacuated its 60 residents before severe weather struck the building in Trumann, about 30 minutes southwest of Monette in the Jonesboro area.

At Monette Manor, about 65 residents were split between designated storm safety areas on the south end, where Richards was, and on the north end of the building. The north end sustained even greater damage, the roof yanked off and windows shattered. Cars in the parking lot — including Richards’ brand new truck — were covered with mud, some dented apparently by debris, others with windows blown out.

Linda Knapp has worked as a certified nursing assistant at Monette Manor for 24 years. Saturday morning, she looked past the swinging metal pieces, the fluffs of pink building insulation through the doorway where she helped her residents out of the building. Abandoned wheelchairs sat folded up amid the debris.

As the storm hit, she was caring for a resident in the restroom. The destruction happened in a flash.

“It was no time at all,” Knapp said.

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