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Flash flooding

Lehman's cleans up enough to open front lobby Tuesday

By LAURA SIEDLECKI
Staff Writer

KIDRON — Just as CEO and President Galen Lehman wanted, the front lobby of Lehman's opened Tuesday around noon after countless hours of cleaning. "The little pats, caring looks and volunteer workers stood between me and a total collapse," Lehman said Tuesday. Lehman's kept customers and Facebook "friends" updated with status updates and pictures galore. The Buggy Barn next to the lobby was filled with 50 percent off flood damaged merchandise.

Cleanup will continue and the Lehmans are asking those who are interested in volunteering to call 1-888-438-5346. Lehman hopes to open additional departments each day. He said they hope to have the book department open today, along with the housewares department. The catalog, warehouse, phone ordering department, shipping and website were not affected since the facility is at a different location.

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Lehman's in Kidron devastated by floods



Lehman's in Kidron was closed Monday, Feb. 28, after an early morning flood washed through the store with up to three feet of water. Employees are working around the clock to remove the debris and mud.

By Lisa Amstutz
Floodwaters rushed through Kidron early Monday morning as snowmelt swelled the water went down pretty quickly after that. "It's pretty devastating," said Galen Lehman, president of Lehman's. "It was like a tidal wave through the store. It was in place already and down in inches."

Carl Croskey was the first employee to arrive at the store at around 5:30 a.m. "When I came in, water had just started coming over the top of the parking lot," he said. "It was like a tidal wave through the store. It was in place already and down in inches."

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Lehman's Employees Wake to Watery Nightmare—3-foot of Water & Mud Floods Kidron Store

Glenda Lehman-Ervin, vice president of marketing for Lehman's Hardware in Kidron, surveys water and mud soaked toys at the store. About 3 feet of water flooded the store Monday morning as snow melted along with rain as the nearby Sugar Creek overflowed. The water flooded the entire store causing an estimated \$100,000 in damage to merchandise. In the rear by Sugar Creek overflowed. Employees reporting to work at Lehman's Hardware to begin opening the store early Monday morning discovered a river of water literally running through the Kidron Store.

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Lehman's founder, Jay Lehman, pushes a floor cleaner through the store in Kidron after floodwaters left mud and debris throughout the store.

FLOOD

The rushing water left the store in shambles. "When I walked in, I thought I was going to throw up," said Glenda Lehman Ervin, vice president of marketing. "I still cannot believe the scope of this mess. Every single nook and cranny is trashed. The stove room filled up first, crested, and then whoosh—it just flowed through the whole store."

Not an inch of the 32,000-square-foot store was left untouched. Heavy crocks were tossed around and freezers and refrigerators knocked over. The toy area was filled with a two-foot deep pile of ruined toys and items washed in from other departments. Aisles throughout the store were blocked and the floors littered with products swept off the shelves by the floodwaters. Any products remaining on the lower shelves were coated with mud.

Teams of store employees are working around the clock to inventory and remove damaged items and clean up the mud left behind. Volunteers from Valley View Mennonite, Kidron Mennonite, and Central Christian School pitched in to help, along with other Kidron residents. Neighbors Charlene Leimeister and her son, Jacob, heard about the damage and walked over to join the work crew. "It's just the thing to do," Leimeister said.

Area businesses offered assistance as well. Gerber Poultry provided lunch for the workers while Ventrac brought tractors to help move items and the local fire department hosed down the parking lot.

Despite the seeming impossibility of the task, Lehman Ervin was optimistic that the store would be open for business Tuesday morning. "We're going to open the center of the store. We're triaging what can be saved and working outward toward the ends of the store."

There were some bright spots, she noted. The warehouse is located off-site in Dalton and wasn't damaged. No one was hurt, and most of the store's irreplaceable antiques were high enough to have escaped damage. And while there was damage to outlets, power strips, computers, etc., the electrical system was not significantly damaged.

"We just can't figure it out. There's no record of the creek flooding in 100 years," said Scott Ervin of Green Ridge Builders, who was inspecting the store's electrical system. He said that had the waters risen above the switchgears, the situation could have been far worse.

While no damage estimates were yet available, the flood was a huge setback in what had been shaping up to be a good business year. When asked how people can help, Lehman Ervin said, "Remember us when we open again. It'll take a while to recover from this."

See Pg. A5 — LEHMAN'S

Historic flood leaves inches of mud inside Lehman's in Kidron

By Beverly Keller
Local Edition Editor

Flood waters rushed. Flood waters roared. Flood waters ripped through all 32,000 square feet of Lehman's in Kidron with an unprecedented fury that left inches of mud and lots of debris inside the store located in downtown Kidron. As Galen Lehman who serves as CEO and President of Lehman's said, "Lehman's Kidron store had three feet of floodwater in it this morning. We'll be closed for days. I feel like crying. Instead, I'm going to roll up my sleeves." Many others took that initiative and rolled up their sleeves as well. All employees were asked to come to work dressed to clean. They wore work boots and brought squeegees and made the best of a bad situation as they attempted to remove water that in some places was still over 18 inches deep. According to Greg Wood who serves as Lehman's E-Commerce Director and Web Master, the community has really stepped up to help the store. "The community of Kidron has been a hand, including...



Harold Moser squeegees mud from the floor at Lehman's. Owners estimated about \$100,000 in flood damage was done to the store Monday.



Debris from the shelves and other buildings littered the floor of Lehman's store Monday morning.

Lehman's

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"It seems like (the damage) shouldn't have happened to this capacity," said Lehman Ervin. Lehman Ervin said she was thankful the warehouse was still off-site and business was still open and running there. She said she was thankful the "flash flood" went through the store when no employees or customers were there. However, she was upset about the lost business, all the cleanup that had to be done and the expected overtime that would be added. "It's horrible to see hand-made pottery covered in mud. There's going to be a lot of wood damage, too," she said.

Wood noted that area churches, businesses and even students at Central Christian School have offered to lend a hand. "It's times like these that really show how a community can come together." Wood posted in response to offers of support placed on the store's website and Facebook page. He also indicated that several other homes and businesses in the area had been affected by the flooding but thankfully, no one was injured. It was noted that phone and website orders were still being taken at the center for that operation is in nearby Dalton and was not affected by the flooding. As of press time on Tuesday, a small portion of the business had been salvaged.

Mike Schenk photo/www.buydrphotos.com
Jay Lehman uses a Shop-Vac to help clean the floors in the showroom at Lehman's in Kidron.