

THE BLADE

Willard chemical spill evacuees share a meal of Thanksgiving *Governor Greets Displaced Residents*



By Vanessa Mccray

WILLARD, Ohio — Thanksgiving didn't feature the stay-at-home holiday meal the Gibsons had planned, but they and others displaced from their homes after a railroad chemical spill made the best of the holiday.

Chassity Gibson, her daughters Karlee, 8, and Emilee, 10, and her mother Rita King sat down Thursday to a Thanksgiving meal at a long table in the Willard High School cafeteria surrounded by scores of neighbors.

Three generations of the family chatted with each other and briefly with Gov. John Kasich, who greeted residents of the

southern Huron County city as they waited for word that they could return to their homes.

"I'm thankful that they fed us," said Karlee, of the spread that included ham with pineapple slices, stuffing, corn, potatoes, rolls, cranberry sauce, and desserts.

About 400 houses were vacated early Wednesday morning after a derailment at the CSX Transportation rail yard led to the spill of about 13,000 gallons of styrene monomer, a flammable chemical used to make plastic.

Most residents were allowed to return to their homes around 3 p.m. Thursday after air testing showed it was safe. For about 10 percent of residences closest to the spill site, however, access was closed as cleanup efforts continued late Thursday.

Willard city manager Brian Humphress said he hoped the remaining displaced residents could return no later than Saturday.

"Everything with the cleanup ... has gone better than what we hoped," he said.

The Gibson family spent two nights at a hotel in Tiffin, more than 20 miles west of Willard. They arrived at the high school cafeteria for the Thanksgiving meal and to wait for the official OK to return to their house on West Pearl Street.

Ms. Gibson had finished her grocery shopping to make a holiday meal with turkey, ham, and all the traditional dishes when their Thanksgiving plans were disrupted. They postponed their homecooked feast until today, and she still planned to shop holiday sales Thursday night in Mansfield.

"A little mini-vacation," Ms. Gibson said of the unexpected turn the previous two days had provided. "Make the best of a bad situation."

Mr. Kasich stopped by the cafeteria to shake hands, pose for pictures, and wish people a happy Thanksgiving.

Paper turkeys decorated the tables, while a television showed the Detroit Lions' Thanksgiving football game, this year against the Green Bay Packers.

Concessions by Cox, the Columbus catering company hired by CSX, started cooking about 6 a.m. About 250 residents attended the meal, according to the city.

"The public seems to be fine. I mean, I think they like the chocolate cake more than the turkey. That's my observation, and ... it's an example of a great community," Mr. Kasich said.

He praised the response from residents, city officials, CSX, and state and federal environmental agencies, and said he expects lessons will be learned from the evacuation.

"I hope we'll use Willard as an example of how in a crisis like this people are ... supposed to behave," the governor said.

Rusty Orben, CSX director of public affairs, said air-quality testing will continue during the cleanup and an “exhaustive investigation” to determine the accident’s cause will occur after cleanup is complete, which he said likely would take “a few days.”

Four railroad tank cars involved in the derailment late Tuesday night had been rerailed by Thursday morning, which allowed CSX to move train equipment out of the way and begin digging out ballast stone and soil beneath the tracks that was soaked with the spilled styrene. Two of the other derailed cars also contained flammable chemicals.

Gary Sease, another railroad spokesman, had said Wednesday the derailment investigation would be a thorough and prolonged process. The accident brought train traffic on CSX’s busy main line across Ohio to a halt, with some trains diverted to other routes. No passenger trains use the CSX tracks through Willard.

Governor Kasich mentioned a valve on the leaking tank car’s underside had been sheared off by the derailment.

Gary Ousley, Huron County’s chief dog warden, said his office responded to calls from people who left pets at home during the evacuation.

It is housing 20 to 25 dogs at the dog warden’s office and the Huron County Humane Society until their owners can retrieve them.

He said all the animals the agency had assisted seem to be in good condition.

Debbie Reeder and her family expected to be able to return to their house on Thanksgiving Day, and friends invited them to a holiday meal in nearby North Fairfield, Ohio.

Had they not been forced out of their house, Ms. Reeder said she had planned to make a Thanksgiving meal at home.

Despite the inconvenience, Ms. Reeder is satisfied with the response from CSX, which paid for their hotel stay and for their dogs to stay in a kennel at a local veterinary clinic.

She also was pleased the governor made the trip to Willard.

“That shows that he cares, or he wouldn’t be here,” Ms. Reeder said.

<http://www.toledoblade.com/local/2013/11/29/Willard-chemical-spill-evacuees-share-a-meal-of-Thanksgiving.html#eq6Ep2ObWAK8cvE3.99>



November 29, 2013

Kasich visits displaced

By Andy Ouriel

An unexpected Thanksgiving Day guest greeted about 75 displaced Willard residents. Ohio Gov. John Kasich visited Willard High School, where many took refuge after a derailed train tanker oozed out a potentially poisonous and highly flammable chemical late Tuesday night.

The chemical styrene — an oily, colorless liquid chemical — leaked for almost four hours after the initial spill.

Local officials and CSX Transportation workers rushed to notify about 400 area households, urging them to evacuate the area early Wednesday morning.

Since then, around-the-clock cleanup efforts and tests measuring Willard’s air quality have occurred.

Authorities constantly reiterated how the air quality is now safe in most areas.

Almost all residents could return to their homes after the evacuation alert in these areas ended around 5 p.m. Thursday, according to Willard’s official Twitter page maintained by city officials.

An evacuation order for a few homes on Pleasant Street, North Main Street and Church Street remained in effect as of Thursday night.

Before then, however, more than 200 people sought shelter at an American Red Cross relief station set up inside the high school. Others stayed at hotels paid for by CSX or with nearby family members.

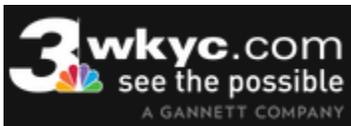
CSX also fronted cash so a caterer could still provide displaced residents inside the high school with a hearty Thanksgiving meal.

People, most seemingly in good spirits, ate heaping portions of turkey, ham, stuffing, mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie at cafeteria tables.

Kasich, who came midway through the meal, talked to various people, offering condolences for the unfortunate situation occurring on such a festive holiday.

"Willard is an example of how you do it right, from the first responders to the people that have been on the ground managing it," Kasich said in a brief statement to media members. "This is the way you do things when it's tough, and it's tough on Thanksgiving."

Article continued here: <http://www.sanduskyregister.com/article/willard-train-derailment/4993026>



Most Willard evacuees allowed to return home

VIDEO: <http://www.wkyc.com/story/news/local/2013/11/28/some-willard-evacuees-allowed-to-return-home/3775743/>

WILLARD -- Mid-afternoon Thursday, city officials say all residents can return to their homes except those on Pleasant Street, the closest to the railyard where the chemical spill occurred. That means 370 families have returned home.

CSX crews worked through the night. Ohio EPA testing shows only minor traces of the chemical styrene in the area now.

CSX employees and safety forces escorted the evacuees back to their homes.

CSX sponsored a community dinner at the high school from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Thanksgiving for all of the evacuees. Gov. John Kasich also stopped by the high school just after 1 p.m. to talk with officials and also visit with those at the community dinner.

Pleasant Street residents can get food at Uncle Dudley's and Country Kitchen Thursday night and Friday and CSX will pick up their food bill.

About 400 households in the city and 25 households outside the city were evacuated Wednesday due to a chemical spill from a CSX railroad car.

Late Wednesday, city leaders and safety forces said evacuees had to remain out of their homes until Thursday. They were sheltered at Willard High School and have also been sent to hotel rooms locally and as far away as Tiffin and Sandusky.

Household pets were taken to local shelters and local veterinarians.

No one has been reported to be injured.

It happened in the Willard rail yard around 11:42 p.m. Tuesday and was contained at 3:20 a.m. Wednesday morning.

CSX official Rusty Orben confirmed that the tanker that leaked is model DOT-111 -- containing highly flammable liquid -- developed a significant hole and that the liquid was pouring out of the tanks.

A CSX spokesperson told WKYC that the incident happened when the rail car was switching tracks. The rail car was carrying 25,000 gallons of the chemical and about 12,500 gallons leaked out..

That liquid is "styrene monomer," which is a highly flammable substance. It is commonly used in packing materials.

Willard Public Safety and CSX clean-up crews remain on the scene, along with the Ohio EPA and the U.S. EPA.



Hundreds of Willard Families Permitted to Return

VIDEO: <http://fox8.com/2013/11/28/displaced-willard-residents-offered-meals/>

WILLARD, Ohio — The City of Willard said approximately 370 families were permitted to return to their homes Thursday afternoon following a dangerous chemical spill Tuesday night.

The evacuation order is still in effect for the Pleasant Street area, which is closest to the chemical spill. The area includes three homes on North Main and one home on Church Street. Authorities say cleanup efforts are still underway in that area and the evacuation notice will be lifted as soon as possible.

Residents still under the evacuation order on Pleasant Street, North Main Street and Church Street are asked to call 1-877-TELL-CSX.

Authorities say a minor odor may still be present, but there is not a threat to the health and safety of residents.



Evacuation order lifted for all but 4 Willard homes

VIDEO: <http://www.toledonewsnw.com/story/24080916/evacuated-willard-families-making-the-best-of-thanksgiving-after-chemical-spill>

The residents of four homes, three on North Main Street and one on Church Street, have not been allowed to return home yet.

Hundreds of families were evacuated from their homes Tuesday night after a train derailment and subsequent chemical spill. Ohio Governor John Kasich visited the evacuated families Thursday afternoon.

A train derailed around midnight Tuesday, which caused a 4-inch puncture in a DOT-111 tanker carrying styrene monomer, a chemical used in plastic. Styrene monomer is highly flammable and could cause respiratory damage. The car spilled nearly all of its 30,000 gallon load, but CSX says it has not contaminated the water supply. They also say all tankers are inspected before and after departure.

Willard residents living within a half mile from North Main Street and the double viaduct were told to evacuate to the local high school or a hotel. Approximately 400 households are within that range. Some residents received phone calls, and others were alerted by police and fire crews going door to door.

Police and firefighters picked up pets in the evacuation area, at the owners' request. Pets have been taken to local animal shelters and dog wardens.

No injuries have been reported in the incident.

CSX paid for everyone affected to stay in three Tiffin hotels: the Hampton Inn, Quality Inn and Holiday Inn. The company is also providing a Thanksgiving meal from 1 to 4 p.m. at Willard High School, where the American

Red Cross has set up a shelter. Residents displaced can also eat at Dudley's and Country Kitchen Thursday. CSX will pay the bill.

Affected residents will be able to present an itemized list of cost incurred because of the spill to CSX representatives beginning at 9 a.m. on Saturday at the Christian Alliance Church.

Gov. John Kasich met with city and CSX officials Thursday afternoon and attended the community dinner at Willard High School. Kasich says the situation is being handled right.

Affected residents will be able to present an itemized list of cost incurred because of the spill to CSX representatives beginning at 9 a.m. on Saturday at the Christian Alliance Church.



Gov. Kasich visits Willard; evacuation orders lifted for most residents

VIDEO: <http://www.13abc.com/story/24093098/gov-kasich-visits-willard>

Dozens of people are still waiting to get back to their homes this Thanksgiving, more than a day after they were displaced because of a train derailment and chemical spill. The whole situation started late Tuesday night at the CSX railyard in Willard.

After the spill, emergency crews evacuated some 400 homes within a half-mile radius so crews could clean up. On Thursday, the city announced most of those residents can return home, all except for those along Pleasant Street.

As you can imagine, it was not how families wanted to spend their Thanksgiving. Governor John Kasich met with residents who were evacuated.

CSX, state and local leaders also briefed the governor during a private meeting. More than 12,000 gallons of styrene monomer, a flammable product used to make plastic and rubber, spilled from the car. CSX is investigating why the train derailed.

"What was unusual is the safety valve was on the bottom of the car. We have to start thinking about whether there's a way to move it. It got sheared off as the car moved but they going to look at all that," says Governor Kasich.

CSX provided a Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings for everyone displaced by the accident.

Willard's fire chief says they have no idea how long it will take to complete the cleanup or when the last displaced residents will be allowed to return home.



Evacuation over for most in Willard after chemical spill

VIDEO: <http://www.northwestohio.com/news/story.aspx?id=977459#.UpfpIMSsim4>

WILLARD -- According to the City of Willard's Twitter account, the "evacuation zone for most of the potentially affected area surrounding the Tuesday night chemical spill" has been lifted.

That excludes less than a half dozen living in homes, in the Pleasant Street area, that are still under evacuation after a 12,500 gallons of hazardous material leaked at the CSX rail yard when several train cars derailed.

To accommodate those that are still unable to return home, the Community Outreach Center will remain open at least through the weekend.

[Earlier today](#) reports indicated that many of the residents, displaced by the spill, might have to stay out of their homes until at least Friday.

Since the spill, CSX has provided evacuees with hotel rooms in Willard and in nearby cities.

The company also provided those forced out of their homes with a make-shift Thanksgiving dinner held at Willard High School and more than 250 residents took part.

Ohio Governor John Kasich made the trip to Willard on Thursday to meet with the families impacted by the spill, at the CSX-provided dinner, and to be briefed by local officials on the clean-up effort.

CSX has also offered residents, in the evacuation zone, a way to monitor the air in their homes if they have any concerns about their safety.

According to the City of Willard, "air monitoring in the area has consistently showed the air to be safe, despite a minor odor. This odor should disappear in the next few days."

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