Deadly disaster makes history

The Fort Worth Water Gardens stands still, frozen solid and covered in blankets of snow. The city received several inches of snowfall during the second week of February.

Students reflect on unexpected devastation they faced in wake of dangerous Winter Storm Uri

ALYSON OLIVER & JOSE ROMERO campus editor

Historic winter storm Uri is fin- ished, but its presence has left a lasting impact.

“Trying to keep up with school, transferring, a winter storm, and the normal stresses of life all while still in the middle of a pandemic has been difficult, to say the least,” student Teresa Montez said.

During the freezing tempera- tures, over 4 million Texas residents were powerless on Feb. 16. Some were without electricity for several days. According to the Electric Reli- ability Council of Texas, it was four minutes, 37 seconds away from hav- ing a blackout that could’ve lasted months.

Montez said her household did not sustain any property damage or experience any other issues such as power loss.

“It’s been a rough year for students,” student Gregory Taylor has said. “Losing a week of school due to the blizzard has forced us to cram for Proctorio, an online video-proc- edure, mid-term exams, and in-person exams more favorable.” Hammoudeh feels that the service is an invasion of privacy, making it more uncomfortable taking my exams in my own home be- cause I’m not in a room packed with people, however, Proctorio makes me anxious because I feel like I am going to be accused of cheating when I’m not,” Hammoudeh said.

“Despite the struggles they encounter, students can succeed despite the hardships they face,” student Maram Hammoudeh said. Hammoudeh feels that with hard work, students can succeed despite the struggles they endure.

“Exam seasons are challeng- ing and it might require more ef- fort this time, but I do think we can get through this,” Hammoudeh said. “It’s been a rough year for students, but with perseverance and effort, success is within reach.”

“The emotional and financial burdens these failing systems are causing make it clear that widespread reform is long overdue.” —- Teresa Montez, student

She let a friend without electric- ity stay with her and her husband, she said. Currently, she is letting another friend shower and do laundry at her house since she is without power. Montez said now, despite fol- lowing guidelines to keep from over- working her heating system, she’s seeing an electric bill that will likely be at least $400.

“The emotional and financial burdens these failing systems are causing make it clear that widespread reform is long overdue,” she said. “I’m upset by the situation and the deaths it caused, she said. During the storm, nearly 80 people died according to The Wall Street Journal. In Harris County, at least 15 of the deaths were from hy- pothermia. According to The Texas Department of State Health Services, it may take several weeks before Texas has a finalized tally of the deaths.

The Dallas-Fort Worth area ex- perienced the coldest three days in a row since 1983, according to The Dallas Morning News.

“Firefighters scale a 150-foot ladder to spray the burning Advanced Foam Recycling plant with water.”

LOGAN EVANS/The Collegian

“Alumni fight giant factory fire”

A flaming plume of smoke bruised the sky over Fort Worth a deep black, spilling out from what had once been Advanced Foam Recycling in Richland Hills. Hundreds of emergency respond- ers and onlookers surrounded the closed facility as it burned — the result of an industrial fire.

“I’ve been in the fire ser- vice for 30 years, and this was the biggest fire I’ve ever fought,” Richland Hills fire chief and TCCD alum Na- shon Burke said. Just before the accident, the morning of Feb. 25 was business as usual for nearly 150 employ- ees who worked in the building to recycle old foam into stuffing for pillows, plush animals and dog beds — things of comfort.

By the afternoon, that build- ing was a jagged wreckage the ri- size of a city block.

“Alumni fight giant factory fire”

A Fort Worth fire engine company was the first on the scene. They were soon joined by multiple departments from the Fire Service, page 5
greater Fort Worth area, all of which played a part.

“Our guys were on I-20 finding a car accident and tuned around to see this huge column of water,” Shelly said. “They immediately responded.”

Within minutes, the scene was an active scene. The growl of the flames and the wail of emergency vehicles collided in a wall of sound. Smoke spewed over streams of water as the wind whipped, at one point blowing back into a gathering crowd of onlookers.

Some Tarrant County residents saw the smoke from over a dozen miles away and thought it was coming from just outside their neighborhood — a testament to the size of the inferno.

Over 125 emergency personnel fought the fire as it burned from noon Feb. 25 to evening the next day for a total of 29 hours.

“I ended up going to the tip of the ladder to get a better view of it so we could find the right spots,” Willis said. “Wells and her company sprayed hot spots for over five hours. It wasn’t until 5:30 that evening — 29 hours into the fire — that responders cleared the scene.

For the next two days, drivers on the nearby highway reported small flames in the wreckage as hot foam reignited beneath the collapsed roof. Shelly’s department dispatched to the site several times to obliterate the flare-ups.

Until the building owners settle with their insurance company and demolish the wreckage, this may continue to happen, Shelly said.

Shelly graduated from TCC Fire Training Academy in 1995 and worked as a firefighter in Arde, Colleyville and Southlake before joining the Richland Hills Fire Department in 2014. To know that the biggest fire of his long career was fought without a single death or major injury makes him proud.

“To get through an incident that long with so many people involved and not have any injuries is a testament to everybody’s professionalism and the care that they took,” he said. “It was a big one.”