

Dunlap Continues to Rebuild Following Spring Hailstorm

The sound of hammers and nail guns has become a familiar soundtrack in Dunlap. Months after a spring hailstorm damaged homes, businesses and community facilities throughout town, construction crews remain a common sight. New roofs and siding are appearing block by block, and with the extent of the damage, the rebuilding process could continue for another year or more.

"I go around through town looking at all the construction, and I'm proud that Dunlap is getting it done," said Dunlap City Council Member Mike Gunia. "I'm proud that we have neighboring towns coming in with construction crews helping us."

Some of the storm damage, however, is much less obvious.

One example is Dunlap's LED community sign along Highway 30 near the Dunlap Golf Course. To motorists passing by, the sign may appear relatively unscathed. A closer inspection tells a much different story.

Hail caused extensive damage to the south-facing side of the electronic display, and every LED panel on that face will need to be replaced. It is a significant and costly repair to a community improvement that was installed only a few years ago.

The sign is covered under the City of Dunlap's insurance, and funds have also been set aside to help with future maintenance and repairs. Still, no one anticipated needing such extensive repairs so soon after the sign was installed.

The sign was funded primarily through a grant from the Iowa West Foundation, along with funding from the City of Dunlap and local donors. Chesnut Signs custom-built the cabinet, while the LED display was manufactured by Daktronics.

Since its installation, it has served as a community message board, promoting local events, activities, announcements and other information to residents and motorists traveling Highway 30.

"It makes Dunlap a lot more noticeable, seeing things that are going on in town," Gunia said. "People driving through town look at that and think it's pretty cool."

The LED sign replaced a marquee-style sign installed in the 1990s. After decades of exposure to Iowa weather, the old sign had become cracked and worn. Updating it also required someone to physically change letters outdoors using a ladder or telescoping tool. The LED version can instead be updated from a computer, allowing multiple messages to rotate throughout the day.

"It is so much better than the previous version," Gunia said. "It shows Dunlap is ahead of its time. We're trying to be noticeable."

The damage to the sign is just one part of a much larger recovery taking place throughout the community. Homes, businesses, nonprofit facilities and public properties were all impacted by the storm, and contractors continue working their way through a long list of repairs.

Gunia experienced that process firsthand. His own home required a new roof, siding, gutters and other repairs.

"It was very easy — the insurance companies did a very good job, and the contractor did a good job of putting it together and getting it done," he said. "We have some awesome contractors in town. They're helping the people."

While Dunlap's rebuilding is well underway, it is far from finished. Some of the progress is easy to see in new roofs and siding. Other repairs, like the extensive work required on the community LED sign, may go largely unnoticed.

But taken together, they tell the story of a community continuing to recover — one roof, one building and, in this case, one LED panel at a time.