

THE MORNING CALL

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MONDAY

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WEST READING CHOCOLATE FACTORY

Explosion death toll rises to 5

Officials have confirmed that another body was found in the rubble late Sunday morning

By David Mekee
Reading Eagle

Another body has been found in the rubble of a West Reading chocolate factory that exploded Friday evening. Borough officials confirmed that just before 10:45 a.m. Sunday, rescue workers pulled a fifth victim from the debris at the R.M. Palmer Co. plant site. Earlier Sunday, officials reported that a fourth victim had been discovered in the overnight hours.

The identities and other information about those who lost their lives in the blast have not been released.

Two people believed to have been in the South Second Avenue facility are still unaccounted for, officials said. Rescue crews are continuing to work around the clock to locate them.

So far, just one survivor has been pulled from the rubble. Officials said that early Saturday morning a woman who is believed to have been working on the

second floor of the plant was found covered in debris in the building's basement. She was located when rescue dogs drew workers close enough to hear her calling for help.

The explosion at the plant happened just before 5 p.m. Friday. It elicited a shockwave that rattled the small borough, and a loud, quick boom that sent neighbors fleeing into the street.

Officials have said the cause of the explosion is still under investigation.

West Reading Mayor Samantha Kaag said the odds of finding other survivors continues to dwindle as the hours pass. On Saturday she said that rescue workers were racing against time,

but the next morning her description was more grim. "Honestly, it's just a hold out for hope," she said.

Rescue efforts were expected to continue the rest of Sunday. Because of that work, roads in the area that have been closed since the blast will remain shut down through at least 8 a.m. Monday, Holben said.

Kaag said that along with the continued rescue efforts, borough officials are trying to provide support to the families of victims. They are coordinating with local service agencies to make sure those families have access to whatever they need, and are meeting with families of those still



Crews continue to clear debris Sunday in search of victims at the site of the explosion at the R. M. Palmer Co. chocolate factory in West Reading. BILL UHRICH/READING EAGLE

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Speaker of the Pennsylvania House Joanna McClinton, D-Philadelphia, takes a picture with Bethlehem NAACP President Esther Lee on Sunday. AMY SHORTELL/THE MORNING CALL

'Hope is not lost'

House speaker visits Bethlehem NAACP chapter

By Anthony Salamone
The Morning Call

State Rep. Joanna McClinton returned to the Lehigh Valley on Sunday for the first time since she became the first woman to serve as speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, encouraging residents to stay active, committed and engaged in their communities.

Previous generations of Black leaders have done exactly that, she told the local NAACP chapter, but their progress has been undermined.

"We lived in a nation with all its promise, with all of our red, white and blue, that still had a lot to learn about respecting everyone's humanity," McClinton said before nearly 200 people at the Bethlehem NAACP's 78th Freedom Fund Banquet at Green Pond Country Club in Bethlehem Township.

Still, she said, hatred and efforts to dismantle the work of groups such as the NAACP continue locally and around the state.

"Here we are, in 2023, where somehow we are facing the same challenges," McClinton said. "All we have to do is see the hatred that is spilled out by some in elective office, and groups trying to dismantle all that the NAACP has worked to build."

"I just want to encourage you that hope is not lost; all is not lost," she said.

Since her last NAACP appearance locally in 2019, McClinton, 40, has advanced in the state House. Last month, she was chosen as the first female speaker of the

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Kimberly Patton sifts through the remains of a family member's home Sunday in Rolling Fork, Mississippi. JULIO CORTEZ/AP

Recovery in focus after fatal storms

Miss. emergency declaration clears way for federal aid

By Michael Goldberg and Emily Wagster Pettus
Associated Press

ROLLING FORK, Miss. — Help began pouring into one of the poorest regions of the U.S. after a deadly tornado tore a path of destruction for more than an hour across a long swath of Mississippi, even as furious new storms Sunday struck across the Deep South.

At least 25 people were killed and dozens of others were injured in Mississippi as the massive storm ripped through more than a half-dozen towns late Friday. A man was also killed in

Alabama after his trailer home flipped over several times.

Search and recovery crews resumed the daunting task of digging through flattened and battered homes, commercial buildings and municipal offices after hundreds of people were displaced.

The storm hit so quickly that the sheriff's department in Rolling Forks barely had time to set off sirens to warn the community of 2,000 residents, said Mayor Eldridge Walker.

"And by the time they initiated the siren, the storm had hit, and it tore down the siren that's located right over here," Walker said, referring to an area just blocks from downtown.

The mayor said his town

was devastated.

"Sharkey County, Mississippi, is one of the poorest counties in the state of Mississippi, but we're still resilient," he said. "We've got a long way to go, and we certainly thank everybody for their prayers and for anything they will do or can do for this community."

President Joe Biden issued an emergency declaration for Mississippi early Sunday, making federal funding available to hardest hit areas.

Recovery efforts in Mississippi were underway even as the National Weather Service warned of a new risk of more severe weather Sunday — including high winds, large hail and possible tornadoes in Georgia, Louisiana, Missis-

sippi and Alabama.

A tornado touched down early Sunday in Troup County, Georgia, near the Alabama border, according to the Georgia Mutual Aid Group. Affected areas included the county seat of LaGrange, about 67 miles southwest of Atlanta.

About 100 buildings were damaged, with at least 30 uninhabitable, and five people suffered minor injuries, officials said. Many roads, including Interstate Highway 85, were blocked by debris.

Two tigers briefly escaped from their enclosures at Wild Animal Safari in Pine Mountain, Georgia, after the park sustained extensive tornado damage. "Both have now been found, tranquilized, and safely returned to

a secure enclosure," the park said on Facebook. None of its employees or animals were hurt, it said.

Mississippi is one of the poorest states in the country, and the Delta has long been one of the poorest parts of Mississippi — a place where many people work paycheck to paycheck in jobs tied to agriculture.

Following Biden's declaration, federal funding will be available for recovery efforts in Mississippi's Carroll, Humphreys, Monroe and Sharkey counties, including temporary housing, home repairs, loans covering uninsured property losses, and other individual and business programs, the White House

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St. Luke's-Monroe cited by state for infraction

Hospital accused of failing to ensure suicidal patient received proper supervision

By Leif Greiss
The Morning Call

Leaders at St. Luke's University Health Network's Monroe Campus failed to make sure a suicidal patient was properly watched, an investigation by the Pennsylvania Department of Health found.

The report, based on an inspection Nov. 15-28, found the hospital failed to comply with state rules and regula-

tions, specifically the licensure responsibilities of the hospital's chief executive officer. As a result, the hospital updated its internal guidance for continuous observation of psychiatric patients.

Mark O'Neill, spokesperson for the Pennsylvania Department of Health, said St. Luke's was not issued any fines nor faced any other additional corrective action, as a result of the inspection.

In a statement provided by

the network, Don Seiple, president of St. Luke's-Monroe, said the hospital reported the event voluntarily. He added voluntary event reporting is a best practice in the health care industry and promotes continuous improvement at hospitals.

"The patient received excellent care, was always safe and suffered zero harm. This is about documentation," Seiple said. "The state's report identified opportuni-

ties for St. Luke's to make its internal reporting processes even better so as to improve the documentation of treatment involving the remote monitoring of behavioral health patients — and we have already updated our internal guidance accordingly."

The state report

A patient was brought to the Monroe campus Sept. 15 while experiencing suicidal

ideations, alcohol withdrawal, manic delirium and a skin infection. The report states the patient also had access to multiple guns.

Once the patient was medically stable, they were admitted for inpatient psychiatric care, assessed as being a moderate suicide risk and ordered to be on one-to-one observation.

One-to-one observation is for patients who pose a high risk of harming themselves

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