

Tornado surprises storm chasers

*HASTINGS MAN: AURORA
TWISTER 'JAW-DROPPING'*

TONY HERRMAN

therrman@hastingstribune.com

While storm chasing Wednesday night, Pete McConnell of Hastings came within 150 yards of one of the most impressive tornadoes he's ever seen in his time as a professional storm chaser.

The executive director of the Crossroads Center followed the storm from northern Buffalo County to just west of Aurora, where the tornado struck the Iams

pet food factory. He said he has been a storm chaser for five or six years.

"The tornado that was west of Aurora was very intense. I would say it was jaw-dropping," he said. "It took us by surprise. We weren't expecting it."

McConnell and his storm chasing partner, Jeff Crecelius, also of Hastings, followed the tornado along U.S. Highway 34 until it disappeared in the rain.

"It appeared to miss Aurora from what we could see, which was fortunate," he said.

McConnell said he and Crecelius go storm chasing "as often as we're

able to get out."

Multiple tornadoes passed just north of Tribland Wednesday night, while the southeast corner of the area experienced some hail damage from a separate storm in the morning.

"It was a highly unstable environment with a lot of deep-layer windshear due to strong winds aloft," said Jeremy Wesely, meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Hastings. "That combined with a surface warm front to produce several large super cells during the late afternoon and evening hours."

Wesely said there were at least three individual tornadoes involved.

He said the largest storm began in Buffalo County, north of Kearney, and tracked east to north of York.

Looking ahead, he said there is a chance of thunderstorms tonight and Saturday night into Sunday.

Temperatures are expected to be in the mid-80s Friday and Saturday and then heat up to around 90, where they'll stay until early next week.

The storm Wednesday mainly stayed north of Interstate 80.

Please see *TORNADO*/page B2

Tornado: Storm chasers come close to twister

Continued from page A1

Casey Nuss, Giltner Village Board chairman, said his town lost power for a few hours Wednesday night. He said that was mainly because some lines at the Iams plant had gone down, affecting transmission.

Lightning there did suspend some softball games, Nuss said, but Giltner didn't receive much wind or rain.

"We were just lucky," he said.

A news release from the Southern Power District stated this morning that, with a few isolated exceptions, power has been restored to most customers affected by tornadoes Wednesday. However, crews will be working today to repair damages to poles in Hamilton County, amounting to about two miles of distribution and subtransmission line.

Southern Power recommends avoiding areas affected by tornadoes. Downed power lines can be energized.

Thayer County Emergency Manager Dan Jantzen said Chester received tennis ball- and golf ball-size hail during a

storm that began around 11 a.m. Wednesday.

"They said there was really no wind there, so it was coming straight down," he said. "Some windshields were broken and some hoods were dented."

According to the Nebraska Rainfall Assessment and Information Network, .34 inch of rain was reported northeast of Chester.

Hubbell, just east of Chester, received some hail, but it was small. Jantzen said Byron, just west of Chester, received even less.

Despite the size of the hail stones, Jantzen said effects of the storm weren't too apparent.

"I went through there this morning, there really wasn't anything visible," he said. "The crops didn't look like they were hit hard. I don't know how thick and heavy it was."

The hail damaged what it hit, but without much wind the impact was limited.

"When you have hail with high winds it shreds things and cuts them off," he said.