NEWS RELEASE
June 25, 2012

Tornado Victim Found With Her Child

The Highlands County Sheriff’s Office recently released the identity of the victim who died as a result of the tornado in Venus yesterday. Heather Town, 32 years of age, suffered fatal injuries after being thrown from her home on Montana Trail as a result of the tornado that swept through the area Sunday. Town’s three year old daughter was also injured in the tornado and is currently in stable condition at a Tampa area hospital.

Heather Town was thrown approximately 200 feet into a wooded area when the tornado struck her home. Shortly after the storm moved through a neighbor, Shane Penrod, heard a child crying. He and Jason Knapek, another neighbor, searched the woods and found the victim cradling her daughter. Neighbor Emily Troup joined the rescue effort and made the 911 call. Shane Penrod took the child from the mother and gave her to Jason Knapek who carried her out of the woods and to his truck to wait for EMS. Mr. Penrod and Ms. Troup stayed with the mother until EMS arrived. Another unidentified neighbor provided a blanket and jacket to cover the injured mother.

Highlands County Sheriff’s Deputy Jorge Martinez was the first public safety member to arrive on the scene, followed shortly thereafter by Deputy Brian VanFleet. Within minutes personnel from the Venus Volunteer Fire Department responded and began tending to the victims until EMS arrived. Heather Town was pronounced dead on the scene. Her daughter was transported to Florida Hospital Lake Placid and was later transferred to Tampa.

According to Sheriff Susan Benton, the human story of this storm is the “protection of a mother for her child, she never let go of her little one even in death.”

The debris field from this tornado extended over several miles from the Montana Trail home. Property damage was also sustained in the Lake June, Twin Lakes, Cloverleaf and Lorida areas. Numerous homes suffered structural damage from the storm and trees and power lines were downed throughout the area however we are not aware of any further injuries. Complete electrical service has been restored to all the storm damaged areas at this time.

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