

## **STORM CUTS LINES, RINGS CHURCH BELL**

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The heavens appear to have rung one up at the St. Louis Cathedral on Lindell Boulevard. A lightning bolt apparently set a bell to ringing late Wednesday night. The bolt hit about 11 p.m., in the midst of a heavy storm that passed through the metropolitan area late Wednesday and early Thursday, causing power outages, flooding cellars, backing up sewers, knocking out phone service in many areas and collapsing a hangar being built at St. Louis Downtown-Parks Airport in Cahokia. In the case of the bolt at the cathedral, nobody is sure whether lightning hit the bell itself or somehow damaged the electrical system that controls it. But the noise was real enough for Ruth McClenahan, who has a 14th-floor apartment across the street from the church. About 11 p.m., she said, she heard a noise, "and I thought that the lightning had hit something. Then the bell starting ringing. The lightning was fantastic. It was everywhere. Bang, bang, bang - it was like a war out there." A church spokesman confirmed Thursday that someone had been dispatched at the height of the storm to silence the bell. Not that the bells' noise made much difference. The crash of thunder kept many St. Louisans awake as the series of storms passed through. Meteorologist Guy Tucker of the National Weather Service described the storms as "pretty strong, big cloud-to-ground lightning and rain producers. We did have a fairly high number of cloud-to-ground lightning strikes." Lightning struck the roof at St. Louis City Hall, and the storm caused heavy damage at St. Louis Downtown-Parks Airport in Cahokia. Tucker said rainfall had totaled 2.25 inches in the St. Charles area and 1.71 inches at Lambert Field. The storm was triggered by two slow-moving air masses - rain-cooled air in northern Missouri and hot, moist air to the south, Tucker said. "The two were just clashing," he said. Among the losers were about 15,000 of Union Electric's customers; they lost service early Thursday. UE spokesman Thomas Dehner said the power outages had been concentrated in the Manchester and Bridgeton areas, with others reported in south St. Louis and south St. Louis County. "The cause was lightning for the most part," Dehner said, adding that service had been restored to most customers by late Thursday. David Martin, a St. Louis spokesman for Southwestern Bell, said 300 reports of service interruption remained pending at 4 p.m. At Parks Airport, Director John B. Roach said the hangar that collapsed Wednesday night "was not a complete structure, and so it was not braced for the wind." Other hangars were not damaged, nor were any planes, he added. The wood frame of the hangar, which measured 280 feet by 70 feet, collapsed on itself and caused no other damage. The structure had not yet been wired, nor had it been topped with a roof. In other parts of Cahokia, residents experienced power outages through the night. But Belleville police had no reports of damage. The lightning bolt that hit City Hall struck the roof at about 10 a.m. Thursday. It smashed tiles and damaged the building's fire alarm. Martin Walsh, city building commissioner, said the lightning apparently had caused a power surge in the alarm system. Tim O'Neil and Darrell McWhorter of the Post-Dispatch staff contributed information to this story.

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**GRAPHIC:** Photo; PHOTO...Sam Leone/Post-Dispatch...Vince Bonvicino (right) and Mike Lemmons cleaning up debris from a damaged hanger Thursday at St. Louis Downtown-Parks Airport. The hanger was damaged by a thunderstorm...

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