

By Jan Schultz, The Imperial Republican News Editor

It's not often that our community of Imperial is drawn into a nationwide news event.

That's what happened last weekend as Julie Hanes, who grew up in Imperial, was kidnapped at gunpoint by her estranged husband in Lincoln, and eventually ended up here, forced into a hot cornfield for hours.

The community breathed a collective sigh of relief when it learned she was released safely Sunday evening.

Just like the community, the news staff here at The Imperial Republican isn't faced very often with such volatile news events happening in their backyard.

After learning just after noon the couple was spotted earlier in the area, and admittedly with a little trepidation, I ventured out with the camera just a mile or so from our home to see what was afoot.

When the State Patrol search helicopter was spotted and SWAT team members were gathering nearby, it was evident things were serious.

After spending hours on the scene, and watching as law enforcement numbers continued to grow (about 30 in all ended up working the case), Russ and I, too, breathed a sigh of relief as it all came together with a positive end for Julie Hanes.

The weekend ordeal again showed how the community will come together in times of stress, in times of sorrow and in times of turbulent situations like last weekend.

The Haarberg family offered their farm buildings just outside the northwest edge of Imperial as a staging area for law enforcement, EMTs, civil defense and others.

Offers of equipment from local businesses came in, and people brought food.

Local residents paid attention to the warnings on CodeRed and, for the most part, stayed home and out of the way of law enforcement.

And from our standpoint in covering the news event, local law enforcement including Police Chief Rob Browning, County Sheriff Kevin Mueller and Capt. Jim Parish of the Nebraska State Patrol were very cooperative in taking time for two press conferences on Sunday to keep us updated.

I'm not sure it works that way in all communities, but this area again came together in support during a tough situation.

Hats off to all who contributed.

Our thoughts and prayers remain with the Hanes family as they decompress from this harrowing ordeal.