

Monroe County couple finally getting new home

By Dann Denny
331-4350 | ddenny@heraldt.com

6/7/2009

In June of 2008, roiling flood waters swept into Gary and Martha Frame's modular home in northern Monroe County, forcing the retired couple to fight for their lives.

Today, more than a year later, memories of that fateful day send shivers down Martha's spine.

"I don't like to talk about it," said Martha, who suffered a collapse during the ordeal. "It brings back memories I'd just as soon forget."

The Frames are among the thousands of area residents whose lives were rocked a year ago when torrential rainfall caused historic flooding throughout south-central Indiana.

In Morgan County, the raging waters flooded schools and hospitals, closed roads and wiped out bridges. In Owen County, the Owen County Sports Complex was severely damaged and many Spencer residents, particularly those living close to the White River, lost their homes.

Gov. Mitch Daniels declared Monroe, Brown, Greene, Lawrence, Morgan and Owen counties as disaster areas.

Tabbed as one of the area's worst natural disasters of the last century, it left countless individuals and families without homes, food and clothing. But not without hope.

Thanks to help from friends, family and federal and local agencies — plus some wrought-iron resolve — the flood victims are fusing the fragments of their shattered lives.

Starting over

Last week, the Frames moved into a used, 17-year-old modular home just south of Martinsville. They bought it with some of the \$28,800 they received from FEMA, and used money from the Monroe County Long Term Recovery Committee — a program of United Way of Monroe County — to install a new septic tank and water lines.

They also used a portion of the FEMA funds as a down payment on a 2008 Kia Sedona mini-van, a replacement for the two uninsured vehicles they lost in the flood.

"FEMA and the United Way have both been great to us," Gary said. "Our first home was not insured, so when we lost it and all our possessions, we had to start all over. Without help, we'd be living in a housing project somewhere."

For 40 years, while working at Otis Elevator and Lowe's, Gary contributed to the United Way, feeling a moral obligation to help those less fortunate than himself.

“I never dreamed I would one day be a recipient,” he said. “I’m a proud person, so it’s kind of hard to be on the receiving end. But at the same time I’m extremely grateful.”

‘We’re gonna die!’

The Frames had been living in their three-bedroom modular home since 1977 when the flood waters slammed its aluminum sides at 11:30 p.m. June 6, 2008.

“I’d just given Martha a bouquet of flowers, because the next day was our 39th anniversary,” Gary said. “But we never got a chance to celebrate it.”

Gary and Martha were sitting comfortably in their living room when they saw water begin to gush through their doorways.

“I knew we were in serious trouble,” Gary said. “Martha was hysterical. She started yelling, ‘We’re gonna die! We’re gonna die!’ ”

Martha admits she did indeed panic. “The water was coming in real fast, and I felt trapped,” she said. “I just wanted to get out of there as fast as I could.”

Within minutes, the churning waters lifted the home off its three-foot-high concrete block foundation and dropped it into a swirling sea of muddy water.

“We were standing in the living room, knee deep in water with our furniture floating all around us,” Gary said. “Pretty soon the water was up to our waist.”

The Frames escaped through their front door and — with water up to their chins — began slogging their way uphill toward their daughter’s home.

It took them 30 minutes to make the 700-foot journey. Just before reaching their daughter’s front door, Martha collapsed.

Gary called 911, but the ambulance could not get to the house because of the flood-covered roads. Fortunately, one of their sons-in-law arranged for a four-wheel-drive emergency utility vehicle to take paramedics via some fire trails to the home, where they treated Martha.

Friends to the rescue

Today, the Frames’ first modular home still sits askew off its block foundation, and its interior remains covered with a 2-inch-thick layer of caked mud and mold. The home has a stench strong enough to bring tears to your eyes.

The couple lost almost everything — clothes, appliances, furniture. Gary is trying to repair the refrigerator, and Martha was able to salvage a few family photos, though they’re badly damaged.

Gary says the Red Cross came to their rescue with vouchers for food, clothes, eyeglasses and medicine; and friends and relatives donated clothing and food.

“People bent over backwards to help us,” he said. “You never realize how many friends you have until something like this happens.”

Home at last

For the past year, the Frames have been living primarily at Martha’s brother’s house, but they’ve also spent some time in the homes of her mother and daughter.

They’ve appreciated their relatives’ willingness to take them in, but are happy to finally have their own space.

“We’re not totally settled in yet, but it feels so good to be back in a home of our own,” Martha said. “When we get it all straightened up, it will look really nice.”

Committee helps flood victims

For the past year, the Monroe County Long Term Recovery Committee, a program of United Way of Monroe County, has been providing support and resources to those affected by the massive flooding in the area in June 2008.

The committee has been helping flood victims rebuild or restore their homes by providing such things as mold removal, labor, materials, housing replacements, new furnaces, financial assistance, and total home rebuilds.

The committee is also assisting people address issues as varied as mental health, predatory lending, and health concerns caused by ongoing mold problems. Several local businesses helped by donating or offering their services at discounted rates.

With representatives from nonprofits, faith-based organizations, government and business, the committee formed in the fall of 2008 and began collecting data about existing cases.

In December, the committee made more than 1,200 contacts through a household telephone assessment, focusing on the areas in Monroe County hit hardest by the flooding. Many new cases were identified, and the committee is still receiving calls from residents reporting damaged homes.

With a full-time director, two part-time case managers and a construction coordinator, the committee has closed 213 cases and is providing support and services to 160 individuals and families.

To support its efforts, the committee has received help from many local volunteers and been awarded a grant from the Indiana Natural Disaster Fund — established through a disaster relief and recovery grant from Lilly Endowment for \$45 million made to the Indiana Association of United Ways in June 2008.

United Way of Monroe County was awarded up to \$1,790,031 by the Indiana Natural Disaster Fund to support the committee’s assistance to individuals and families. In addition, the committee received an Indiana Natural Disaster Fund grant of \$228,500 for the replacement of three buses and a van for Area 10 Agency on Aging, the replacement

of carpeting destroyed at the office of Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and assistance to the Hoosier Hills Food Bank to replace a scale used to weigh donated food that serves a six-county region.

The Monroe County Long Term Recovery Committee includes representatives from the American Red Cross, Area 10 Agency on Aging, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, City of Bloomington, Congressman Baron Hill's Office, The Greater Bloomington Chamber of Commerce, Hoosier Hills Food Bank, Indiana University, Monroe County Commissioners, Monroe County Emergency Management, Monroe County Health Department, Monroe County Planning Department, Purdue Cooperative Extension Service, Salvation Army, Sherwood Oaks Christian Church, South Central Community Action Program, St. Paul's Catholic Center, and United Way of Monroe County.

Gary Frame looks through the mud-caked interior of his home in northern Monroe County. The house was totaled by flood water last year.



David Snodgress | Herald-Times

Gary and Martha Frame's new home high on a hill above Bryant's Creek is less vulnerable to flooding.



David Snodgress | Herald-Times