

Village of Neffs St. Clairsville, Ohio

Pictures Tell the Story

Leo Skinner RV

According to song lyrics by Rod Stewart, “every picture tells a story”. In the Village of Neffs, A.C. Wiethe can show you hundreds of pictures, each with their own unique story.

Wiethe is the Assistant Director of Management Services of the Belomar Regional Council, working on behalf of the Belmont County Commissioners, takes great pride in showing before and after pictures of the “Target Areas” in Neffs. On a recent driving tour with the author of this story Wiethe pointed out practically every empty lot in Neffs noting that, “Providing assistance to affected homeowners as well as ensuring no future loss of life and property, due to severe flooding, was the best use of federal money I have ever seen.”

Wiethe is referring to the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) funding of the Ohio Emergency Management Agency’s (OEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) which helped to purchase homes that were damaged or destroyed in massive flooding that took place in September, 2004.

The amount of rain that came inland from Hurricane Francis was just too much to keep the water within the banks of the McMahan Creeks and Neffs was inundated with flood water. The federal presidential disaster declaration that soon followed covered twenty-four counties including Belmont where Neffs is located.

The following are before and after photos of three homes in the Village of Neffs that were purchased, torn down and turned into green space. Photos provided by Belomar Regional Council.





The voluntary Buy-Out and Demolition project started in 2007 and called for the potential acquisition of 54 houses. At the conclusion of the project, 36 homes were purchased and demolished by the County with the property maintained as green space in perpetuity. The acquisition program was funded with federal money totaling nearly \$1 million and the local share provided by the Belmont County CDBG Revolving Loan Fund of \$315,000.

According to Steve Ferryman, Mitigation Branch Chief, Ohio EMA, the Neffs acquisition is one of many FEMA projects being funded through the state. “We have an on-going effort to mitigate future disaster damages throughout the state utilizing the HMGP,” said Ferryman. “In the case of Neffs it just made good sense to avoid repetitive flood damages in the area and buy out as many homes in the floodplain as possible.”

Neffs residents have not experienced the level of flooding they did in 2004 but Wiethe believes the acquisition project will pay off in the long run. “The families who participated in the program surely won’t have to live through that kind of flooding again in their lifetime,” said Wiethe. “And we are all thankful for that.”

The Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) provides grants to States and local governments to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures after a major disaster declaration. The purpose of the HMGP is to reduce the loss of life and property due to natural disasters and to enable mitigation measures to be implemented during the immediate recovery from a disaster.

To find out more go online at FEMA.gov or <http://ohiosharpp.ema.state.oh.us/ohiosharpp/>.