

Whats Going on with the Flood?

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Many of us lived in the neighborhoods of St. Patrick and St. Ludmilla parishes and some still have family who're still there. Most of the damage to residential neighborhoods in the 2008 Flood happened on the west side. The water got a lot deeper and spread a lot further there. This section of the site will try to give you a better idea of how our neighborhoods were affected as well as the rest of the Cedar Rapids community. We also want to post updates on what's happening in our old neighborhoods and in our town now. We hope to gather information to give us all a better idea of the extent to which this event impacted the LaSalle Class of 1969.

Block after block of homes are uninhabitable. Over 1000 are scheduled for demolition in coming months. Those of you who've been away for a while and are coming back this summer will be stunned. You've probably seen photos of water halfway halfway up the doors of St. Pats Church. Imagine water nearly up to the ceiling of our 8th Grade Home room and the Cedar River in front of Kathy Bartas old house. One late evening after Christmas I was taking a friend to his home on Wilson Avenue and ached when he pointed out all the dark houses, block after block, surrounding Czech Village. There were no lights, no decorations, no discarded Christmas wrapping, no people and few cars. There was just junk and houses with restricted entry signs posted on the front doors. Many of these are beyond repair, damaged when the foundations shifted or collapsed as the flood waters receded.

We will be rebuilding for years and Cedar Rapids has been changed forever. Whether it would be for the better was in question for a while but the folks here are determined. You lived here. You know how we can be. Now that good weather is here and more construction money is available, neighborhoods buzz with the sounds of homes being made liveable again. New furnaces and air conditioning, new electrical, plumbing and sheetrock, replaced windows, insulation and sheet rock, everything, all up to current codes. These homes are better than new, when finished. All it takes is money and promised federal help is slow being released when compared with the scale of widespread damage.

What's not widely known is that damages across Iowa were so extensive and state funds must be shared with lots of communities. Cedar Rapids is regarded as large enough and fundamentally sound enough to pay for a larger portion of its own recovery. Voters in Cedar Rapids have long resisted efforts to introduce a 1% local sales tax, making Linn county one of a handful in Iowa that didn't have one. Last week, there was no problem getting voter approval for an increase that will last five years. 90% of the revenue will be used to match Federal contributions that will make buyouts of at least 1000 homes possible. The rest will be used to ease the increase in the city portion of property taxes that is approaching two digits annually. Those not directly affected by the flood are now sharing in the aftermath.

Experiencing all this made me think of the people I grew up and learned with, all of them west-siders, many of them LaSalle Class of 1969. I'm really looking forward to August.