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## 'Mucking and cleaning' teams work up a sweat

Cleaning frenzy greets one-year flood anniversary

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Susan Brown - susan.brown@nwi.com, (219) 662-5325 | Posted: Sunday, September 13, 2009 12:00 am | (0) Comments

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JOHN LUKE | THE TIMES Munster High School football players, Garrett Peck, left, and Kyle Wargo chisel tile from the basement floor in the home of Ruby Blackmon. Members of the Mustangs football team volunteered their time to clean debris from the home as part of an effort to assist folks who sustained damage from last year's flooding.



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Work gloves on and sleeves rolled up, U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky was just another volunteer pitching in to

clean up Ruby Blackmon's flood-damaged house on Hammond's May Street on Saturday.

Led by Joe Czajka, a volunteer with Lakeshore Area Regional Recovery of Indiana, or LARRI, Visclosky joined some half a dozen Munster High School varsity football players in LARRI's Building Blitz, an effort to help victims finally recover from last year's massive flood event.

That people were still in dire straits one year later took not only Visclosky but Czajka by surprise.

"I thought we were done with the mucking," Czajka said.

In less than two hours, the team filled a Dumpster in Blackmon's driveway to overflowing. Trashed were treasures like a stylish black-and-white evening dress Blackmon eyed wistfully and old record albums tinged with fond memories.

Blackmon said water had stood a foot high in her basement. A loan from a Hammond development program helped with major repairs, but it was only after the cleaning team had totally cleared the basement floor that Czajka determined the floor tiles needed to come up.

Finished with dumping lost goods, football players starting chiseling at the sunken tiles.

John Bochnowski said it was the team's coach, Leroy Marsh, who suggested helping out instead of watching training films on Saturday.

"We knew the damage was bad," he said.

Kyle Wargo said the team had helped out when Munster flooded so badly last year so Blackmon's plight wasn't unexpected.

"I can't imagine how I could have gotten this done without them," Blackmon said.

Meanwhile on Gary's Delaware Street, the feat performed by St. John-based Faith Without Borders made homeowner Stella Skinner exclaim, "Whew! Thank you, Jesus!"

Last year's fall flood hit her household on the heels of her husband falling so ill he died in November. A bad hip forced Skinner into surgery, and she lost her job.

On Saturday, eight volunteers removed furniture, appliances and other assorted goods from the basement in record time, clearing the way for Skinner's basement to be sanitized.

Things are finally looking up, she said with a broad smile.

Faith Without Borders volunteer Mary Anne Koke said the group had plenty of experience in "mucking and cleaning" having made eight visits to New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Since last year's tornado in the Highland-Griffith area and then the massive flood, the group has worked away at the damage just about every weekend.

Koke's not surprised by the continuing mayhem, saying there are homes still untouched in New Orleans.

"We're ahead of the game," she said.

Posted in Local on *Sunday, September 13, 2009 12:00 am* Updated: 12:54 am. | Tags: Flood09, Football,

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