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# An unsinkable spirit

Flood 'lifesavers,' victims still battling 2008 deluge's effects

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LU ANN FRANKLIN - Times Correspondent | Posted: Monday, September 14, 2009 12:00 am | No Comments Posted

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KYLE TELECHAN | THE TIMES Harry Porterfield, a CBS-TV reporter, speaks to a crowd about the benefits of volunteering for their communities on Sunday during a picnic for volunteers and victims of the September 2008 flood.

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What a difference a year makes.

On Sept. 13, 2008, rain-fed floodwaters ravaged Northwest Indiana communities, destroying property and overturning lives. One year later, blue skies and bright sunshine set the mood for Sunday's Hope for Life commemoration at Gary's Marquette Park that drew flood victims and volunteers who have helped them recover.

Sponsored by Lakeshore Area Regional Recovery of Indiana, the event included a picnic, a choral concert and speeches by homeowners, volunteers and CBS TV reporter Harry Porterfield, of Gary. Fuerst and Prince, two golden retrievers from the Comfort Dog program of Holy Cross Latheran Church in Portage, attended the event and were swarmed by children and adults.

"It is important that we come together again, as one community, to remember and heal," said LARRI Executive Director Jane Delligatti.

Elaine Faye was finally able to move back into her Munster home on River Drive in May, although there's still interior work to do. During Saturday's Building Blitz sponsored by LARRI, members of Munster High School's football team primed and painted her home's exterior.

"We live right across from the Northcote Bridge. When the levee on Columbia Avenue broke, the water came in within two hours. I thought we were going to die," the 86-year Faye said. Floodwaters reached 18 inches in her home.

"I can't say enough about LARRI. They're lifesavers," she said.

Yvonne Simmons, of Gary, was one of the volunteers working Saturday on Faye's home. She knows firsthand what devastation the floods brought.

"We had lots of water in our family room, bathroom and one bedroom," Simmons said. "We lost a lot of furniture and clothing. It took two days to Shop-Vac the water out."

Simmons also lost her furnace. The money approved by the Federal Emergency Management Administration wasn't enough to pay for a new one, she said.

"We lived there for two months without heat," she said. Mold began growing in the home which, Simmons said, led to a severe lung infection, putting her in an emergency room twice in November. She has recuperated with the help of four different medications, she said.

Although there's still work to do in her home, LARRI funds helped her get a new furnace and make other repairs. So, Simmons said, she felt she needed to return the favor and help others like herself.

"They've done so much for me. How can I not? God blessed me with LARRI and I have to give back," she said.

Many of those whose homes were destroyed are elderly and disabled, said Mary Anne Koke and Helen Rutkowski, members of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in St. John and of the congregation's Faith Without Borders group.

"There are still people who need things taken out of their homes. They've been wet that whole time and

there's mold everywhere," Rutkowski said. "One house we worked at had mushrooms growing out of the paneling and 5 to 6 feet of mold under the paneling."

Faith Without Borders has contributed more than 1,900 volunteer hours since Sept. 20, 2008.

"The stories are just heart-breaking," Koke said.

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