



Sam Tomasello stands in the basement of his Newville home and remembers the home as it looked just a year ago. Tomasello's basement floor cracked and heaved due to water pressure. The home also has other water damage that still has to be repaired. Even though the river level is near normal for this time of year, Tomasello still has seepage in the basement and the sump pump runs constantly.

Newville moves on But scars of 2008 flooding still show in neighborhood

By Stacy Vogel

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NEWVILLE

Pete Sisco and his family seemed worry-free Saturday as they built a retaining wall around his driveway on Ellendale Road along the Rock River.

The men joked about who was doing the most work and enjoyed the unseasonably cool weather. You'd hardly guess that a year ago, the Siscos and their neighbors were scrambling to save their homes from the relentlessly rising water flooding their backyards and basements.

The thousands of sandbags used in the effort disappeared long ago. People no longer are dragging flood-damaged goods out of soggy basements, and no homes are visibly crumbling in this close-knit neighborhood.

But if you look closely, you still can see scars from the historic 2008 flooding. Sisco was lucky. When he rebuilt his home two years ago, he followed recommendations to put it higher and further from the river than the old home. The water came up to the deck stairs behind the house, but it did not enter the structure.

His brother-in-law and next-door neighbor, Sam Tomasello, wasn't so lucky. About 600 gallons of water came into his home in two minutes as the river breached the sandbag wall two houses away last June, he said.

A year later, the home's tiny basement still is damp and smelly. Water seeps through the walls and gathers in tiny crevices on the floor. A small crack in the basement floor popped open during the flooding, and though Tomasello covered it with hydraulic cement, the water still creeps in around the edges. Tomasello has just begun to assess the structural damage, he said. "They (the experts) said they can't fix it," Tomasello said. "They said they can contain it."

If Tomasello had the money, he would lift the house and put it on a new foundation, he said. He didn't have flood insurance, and he doesn't qualify for federal grants because the house is a secondary residence, he said. He and his wife live there about half the year.

That's a problem for many Newville homeowners, said Dave Somppi, Rock County community development manager.

The county has given out \$250,000 in community development block grants for homeowners to repair their homes, but only three of the 24 grants issued so far have gone to Newville.

"None of the grant programs have provided funds to address seasonal or secondary homes, and unfortunately in some parts of the county a large majority of the homes are seasonal or secondary," Somppi said.

Secondary homes also don't qualify for hazard mitigation grants, which allow the county to buy and raze homes with damage totaling more than 50 percent of the value of the home.

The county has applied for grants to tear down six homes outside of Janesville and Beloit, said Scott Heinig, Rock County Planning and Development Agency director. It also has identified four homes that must come down but don't qualify for grants. The county has offered to pay for the demolition costs in those cases.

Heinig didn't know how many of the homes that need to be torn down are in Newville.

The problems with Tomasello's house don't seem to rise to that level, and he plans to fix them the best he can, he said. He hopes to retire in a few years and live in the Newville home year-round.

Still, his heart always will race when the river hits flood stage, as it did in March, he said.

"When it went up to that 11.5 (feet), I was really worried," he said. "I'm like, 'I don't know if we can handle this again.'"