

'People saving people' during floods

By KAYLA BUNGE

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Photo 



Photo by [Al Hoch](#)

Marty Walsh assess the Rock River flood damage to his home on E. Ellendale Rd. and talk about how the neighborhood pulled together during the flood.

Photo 



Photo by [Al Hoch](#)

Front- Eric Nelson and Lyle Johnson, both from Milton, were part of a large group sand bagging at the Newville Red Apple Car Wash in an effort to help save Rock River river-front property.

NEWVILLE — Although the Rock River crested at record levels Saturday morning, dozens of people continued to fill sandbags in the parking lot of the old Red Apple Inn.

“This has been the heart and soul of our operation here,” said John Kinnett, owner of the Anchor Inn and the area’s point man for flood relief efforts.

Hundreds of people have put in more than 12 hours of work filling sandbags every day since late last week.

“It’s people saving people,” said Sandra Kraft of Newville. “It’s not just neighbors. It’s people who stop by to see what’s happening and start working.”

While the floodwaters aren’t expected to continue rising, the force of the rushing water is wreaking havoc on the sandbag walls built to hold back the floodwater. The 6-foot-high, 6-foot-wide sandbag walls are in need of fortification as a brisk wind Saturday and impending thunderstorms Sunday threaten to send the river spilling over them.

Sandbag walls breached

As Kinnett drove his red pickup truck down Gladys Drive, he quietly mourned the breach of a sandbag wall.

“This was one of the first ones we lost,” he said.

Five houses stand immersed in the murky floodwaters, a trio of ducks casually swimming across what used to be the front lawns of summer residents from Illinois.

The sandbag wall broke about 11:30 a.m. Tuesday.

“When we lost this one, it really took a toll on everybody who’d been working on it,” Kinnett said. “We thought our efforts were enough. I mean, there’s always a work-around. There’s always something you can do. But in this case, all you can do is sandbag.

“And now there’s nothing we can do until this goes down.”

After seeing how the breach in the sandbag wall behind the houses on Gladys Drive destroyed five houses in one fell swoop, Kinnett enlisted his crews to change the design of their sandbag walls behind the houses on Ellendale Road.

“This was kind of the focus of our crew,” Kinnett said, referring to the partition walls built between each house on Ellendale Road, where just one house stands immersed in floodwaters.

That sandbag wall broke about noon Wednesday.

“People started shouting, ‘There it goes! There it goes!’” homeowner Marty Walsh said. “It was like a small explosion.

“It turned our world upside down. But it’s not the house, it’s one week’s worth of work gone.”

Disaster brings neighbors closer

“It’s devastating,” Kinnett said as he drove out of the flooded neighborhoods along the Rock River. “You become so involved with these people you don’t even know.”

Perhaps the single silver lining to the worst flooding to ever hit the area is that it’s brought neighbors closer together.

It didn’t matter who needed help, people were willing to pitch in, Kinnett said, from people who’ve lived in the area their entire lives to people who’d just been driving through on the Interstate.

“We’ve left houses and they’re crying,” he said.

Walsh said he’s never seen such a Herculean effort prop up an area as well as this one has.

“I’ve never seen it, not only the physical support but the mental support,” he said. “It means everything to us.”

Walsh said if Kinnett hadn’t taken the initiative last week to work with county officials to have truckloads of sand brought to the area, the flood would have devastated the area much sooner.

“We would have been dead in the water,” he said.

People were ready to work last weekend, Walsh said, but they didn’t have the supplies needed to get started until Sunday.

Kinnett has abandoned the Anchor Inn since floodwaters washed out the parking lot and much of the outdoor seating.

“He let his personal situation go, and he mobilized all these resources,” Walsh said. “He’s doing this to help everyone else, and his business is upside down.”

Kinnett said although the area has weathered much already, the worst is yet to come.

“What we’ve done—that’s the easy part,” he said. “And it was hell. The hard part’s coming.”

Walsh sat on his deck railing, gazing out at the river spilling over its banks and into his backyard.

“It’s not something that’s going to go away tomorrow,” he said. “But we’ll make it.”

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