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For flood victims, trailers become home

ROBERT L. BAKER (STAFF WRITER)

Published: December 23, 2011

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TUNKHANNOCK TWP. - A new trailer park in Wyoming County won't replace what was lost for flood victims, but the first residents to move in Wednesday said they were grateful for their new, temporary homes.

"It's so nice to have something clean like this to move into," said Shirley Porasky early Thursday afternoon.

Married 56 years, Mrs. Porasky and her husband, Francis, of Falls, were among the 12 or so families expected to move in by Thursday to the new park created for some 52 families displaced by flooding from Hurricane Irene or Tropical Storm Lee.

The park is adjacent to the Highfields subdivision about 2 miles south of

Tunkhannock. The agency worked feverishly in recent weeks to get it opened by Christmas, said Federal Emergency Management Agency spokesman Mike Sweet.

He said he expected 25 to 30 families to be in by Christmas and the rest would do so in the days following.

As Mrs. Porasky looked at the coffee pot, other pots and pans, trash can and bedding all supplied courtesy of an area church, she said it was "better than we expected. You couldn't tell from the outside, but it's spacious in here."

The Poraskys had lived between River Road and Route 92 in Exeter Twp., which had not been subject to any serious flooding since 1975 when they completely rebuilt a home that had been hit by flooding from Agnes in 1972.

"We built it much higher than Agnes, and thought it couldn't happen again," Mr. Porasky said, "but we were surprised."

Since the flood on Sept. 8, the Poraskys have been living with their son, Greg, who has been staying in his camper so his parents could have the master bedroom in his house.

They don't feel settled enough to have Christmas in their new digs, but tradition has it for the Poraskys to be at their son's anyway for a big Christmas Eve dinner.

Elenore Mizenko, 61, also pondered her new home across the street and six doors down on Sassafra Drive. She said she is getting to like it, "but I just want to go home." Home was a place in Dymond Terrace that took in 5 feet of water on the main floor on Sept. 8.

Her husband, Edward, said they plan to rebuild the home if they can and thinks the new trailer "serves its purpose" for the time being.

While Ms. Mizenko said she will place an angel on the end table in the living room to remind them that somebody's looking out for them, she said she didn't have the energy to decorate this late in the season and will be having Christmas dinner with her friend Rosemary, who graciously opened her home after the flooding so the Mizenkos would have a place to live.

According to Jack Schuback, coordinator for disaster recovery for FEMA Region III, the park will take in mostly Wyoming County residents up and down the Susquehanna River who were blindsided by the flooding and essentially lost everything.

A park of comparable size was also built near Athens in Bradford County, Mr. Schuback said, and the goal is to have folks in either for no more than 18 months so the residents can get back on their feet.

Each family has a caseworker who knows their situation.

Although cable and phone service are not provided, all other utilities are, and that's a real blessing, Mrs. Porasky said.

She regrets that her former home, Falls, looks like a ghost town these days, but knows that one day it will be back.

Until then, she said, "I am glad to have this new place I can call home."

Contact the writer: bbaker@wexaminer.com

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