

After the Storm

Wednesday, August 31, 2011

NEW JERSEY HERALD

A-7



Photos by Daniel Freel/New Jersey Herald

June Steele walks through the flooded front yard of her Newton-Swartswood Road home in Stillwater Monday.

Stillwater continues to battle flooding

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STILLWATER — It is known by different names — Neldons Brook officially, Stillwater Creek locally — but for many residents, it has become known as a nightmare.

Water from the Neldon Brook, which runs into Swartswood Lake and Willow Crest Lake, continued to rush through eight homes on Newton-Swartswood Road Tuesday, compromising septic tanks and wells and leaving residents fighting to keep their homes above water.

The brook broke its normal course on Sunday — beneath a bridge on Newton-Swartswood Road — roaring left through a number of homes on Newton-Swartswood Road, as well as Swartswood Volunteer Fire Department, Stillwater Park and Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church. The road remains closed to incoming traffic and isn't predicted to open Sept. 12, according to the Stillwater Township website.

Though the water has receded considerably since Sunday, many residents are still fighting to save their homes, according to Township Committee member Anita Straway. She said the option to evacuate the area was proposed to residents on Sunday. However, for families like the Goriscakis and Steeles, to leave would mean relinquishing their home to the waters. They, along with many of their neighbors, have remained to pump water from their basements to assure that the rest of their homes aren't destroyed.

The backyard of the Goriscaki resi-



A tire swing in the backyard of a Newton-Swartswood Road home in Stillwater is seen partially in flood waters Monday.

dence is now consumed by the brook, rushing past an above ground pool and swing set. Terri and Scott Goriscaki have stayed to pump water from their home, but their five children are currently staying with friends in neighboring areas. Terri Goriscaki said her children "no longer felt safe" in the house, where they have lived for the last 18 years.

"I spent my whole life working. Every cent has gone into this house," she said. "I'm scared. All of us are. They are telling us that this is the new path for the stream."

Though she said the house has power, the septic and furnace are out of commission. This area isn't entirely unaccustomed to flooding, she said, as the brook flooded during other storms, including Hurricane Floyd

(1999) and subsequent storms. The flooding, however, has never reached this caliber.

"I knew we were going to flood, but I didn't know we were going to lose everything," she said. "...We can't even come up with a plan to clean up, rebuild."

Frank and June Steele, and their son Joey, 10, also said evacuation wasn't an option.

"If we weren't here, who knows what the water would do?" Frank Steele said.

The brook has paved a new path, making the Steeles' yard and driveway nonexistent. Commenting on the brook's name, June Steele humorously joked that the body of water was now the "Steele Section."

"I have to joke, or I will just cry,"



For a video on this story, visit njherald.com.

she said.

The family has been pumping water from their basement nonstop. Sandbags have also been placed around the yard. The family said they have no time frame for when power will be restored or the flooding will cease.

"Once we lost power, we lost a losing battle," she said. She later added, "It's hell to have this devastation."

A few families have evacuated. Mark and Anita Bastek, who moved to their home in April, have left their home, which can be reached only by traversing knee-deep water to their front steps. The couple put \$10,000 into the house since purchasing it, including a new septic that was destroyed. Yet, Mark Bastek said the two are thankful they didn't lose more.

"All in all, there are a lot of people who have lost everything," he said. "We've got a lot to be thankful for."

When asked about the response to the devastation on Newton-Swartswood Road, he said he thought the town and county were doing all that they could.

"They are doing the best they can. You can't stop a river," he said.

Mayor George Scott, members of the Department of Public Works, the Swartswood Volunteer Fire Department, members of the Sussex County Sheriff's Department, Straway, township officials and others appeared throughout the day to aid in stopping the brook's continued flow through residents' homes. Seven inmates from the Sheriff's Labor Assistance Program placed approximately 120 sandbags, along with those provided by Stillwater Township to dam residents' properties, according to Officer Jason Van Der Wende.

"For two days, this has been my top priority for these people," Scott said.

After a visit from Rep. Scott Garrett, State Sen. Steve Oroho, Assemblyman Gary Chiusano, County Administrator John Eskilson and other county officials on Tuesday, the county agreed to bring in 600 sandbags to aid in redirecting the water from the affected homes, according to Straway. The sandbags will be used to build a four- to five-foot wall where the brook was breached, she said.

The damage sustained in Stillwater from Irene is unlike anything Straway has ever seen, she said. The fire department has received 105 calls pertaining to the storm, she said, which is more than it usually receives throughout the year. Scattered power outages, sporadic phone outages, trees down, roads closed and flooding remain in the Stillwater area.

"We are just absolutely devastated with water, water, everywhere," she said.



Photo by Daniel Freel/New Jersey Herald

Senior citizen residents of Francis Asbury Manor in Ocean Grove board a bus outside Bristol Glen in Newton Monday. The 66 seniors were evacuated from Ocean Grove to Bristol Glen Saturday afternoon ahead of Hurricane Irene and were on their way back home.

Seniors find shelter at Bristol Glen

NEWTON — Bristol Glen had a lot of extra hands on deck over the weekend, as one of the retirement community's sister facilities, Ocean Grove-based Francis Asbury Manor, bused in about 90 residents and 25 staff to stay in Newton during the storm. Monmouth County's Office of Emergency Management ordered the evacuation of the facility's residents as Hurricane Irene approached. Both Bristol Glen and Francis Asbury Manor fall under the banner of United Methodist Homes of New Jersey, which operates 10 retirement communities across the state.

Residents and staff from Francis Asbury Manor were set up on cots in rooms around Bristol Glen, including the chapel, a classroom and the health care center. However, matters were complicated when Bristol Glen lost power on Saturday. While the facility has back-up generators, they are only powerful enough to provide electricity to essential components, said Scott Norton, executive director of Bristol Glen. Through the tireless efforts of staff members, the residents of Bristol Glen and the guests from Francis Asbury Manor made it through Sunday, Norton said.

Once Monmouth County personnel gave the green light, the Ocean Grove denizens were able to return home Monday afternoon. Power wasn't restored to Bristol Glen until 9:30 p.m. Monday. Norton praised the commitment of both his staff and that of Francis Asbury Manor and said there is a strong sense of kinship within the United Methodist Homes family. "We'll do anything for each other," he said.