

Be Prepared: A Solution for Living Near the River

Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana

Amite, LA – When Jack and Fancy Hanks decided to build a house just 200 feet from the Tangipahoa River, they saw an opportunity to create a home that could stand up to nearly anything Mother Nature could throw at it.

When Hurricane Isaac made landfall in August 2012 and severely damaged thousands of homes in Louisiana, the couple's planning paid off. The slow-moving storm swamped other buildings in their area, but the Hanks' home stayed snug and dry, just as they had planned.

After Jack retired, he and Fancy began making plans to move to Amite, Louisiana, near the Tangipahoa River. Fancy had grown up in the area and wanted to return.

They purchased six acres of land and began planning a 1,500-square-foot home on the banks of the Tangipahoa River.

Before anyone so much as picked up a hammer, Jack spent hours and hours online looking for ways to protect their home.

"It doesn't cost that much more during the construction phase to do it right," he said. "I wanted to make sure I didn't have trouble when a storm comes — because it's going to come."

In 2007, the couple carefully began construction to protect against flooding and 140 mph winds. They started by elevating the site by about five feet, bringing in 80 loads of dirt in 18-wheel trucks for the landfill elevation. They elevated the home another five feet using marine treated pilings.

"I notched the pilings together to give our home strength," Jack said. "The house doesn't shake at all." Between every post, padding helps ensure stability. He also paid particular attention to the roof, using heavy-duty materials. He went beyond building code requirements by using hurricane clips on each rafter, although the code requires them only on every other rafter. He reinforced the concrete under the structure with rebar, then tied everything together for support.

The stovepipe attaches to the roof to keep it in place. The couple had the air conditioning units elevated and the storage tank for the water well located on the second floor over his garage. They made sure trees were far enough away from the house so they would not pose a threat. "I did not want any damage from storms," Jack said.

Workers completed the house in 2008 and the Hanks began enjoying a breathtaking view of the Tangipahoa and living the life they had long dreamed of.

The house's first test came just months after they moved in, when Hurricane Gustav made landfall in September 2008. Their home had no flooding at all. Four years later, as the river began to rise during Hurricane Isaac, Jack felt so confident the house would stand that they decided to wait out the storm there.

However, with the Percy Quin State Park dam on the Tangipahoa River threatening to break from the



storm's force, parish officials ordered a mandatory evacuation, giving the couple just 20 minutes to leave. Authorities feared the 700-acre lake would add more water to the already swollen river, causing devastating flooding, but ultimately, the dam held.

However, the river still rose above flood stage. After the water receded, the couple came home to find that 22 inches of water had buried the concrete slab under the house, with the detached storage shed/garage receiving three feet of water and the bathroom underneath the home also flooding.

As for the house itself, the living area received no water at all.

In contrast, all their neighbors along the river who had not elevated their homes received at least three feet of water in the structures. His advice to them, and to others who live along southern Louisiana's rivers?

"Plan ahead. It's going to happen."