



High and Dry in Chickamauga Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Walker County, Georgia

Chickamauga, GA— In mid-September 2004, Hurricane Ivan brought some of the heaviest rainfall ever recorded to the City of Chickamauga, a small town in northwest Georgia close to Chattanooga, Tennessee. This caused the West Chickamauga Creek to rise, as heavy rains have done for years.



The rising waters inundated properties in the creek's floodplain. This time, one of the affected properties was Charles and Tina Hill's detached garage.

"The water was knee-high in the garage," Charles Hill said, "but the house came through just fine. If the house had not been elevated, the water would have been in our living room!"

Many of the homes in the neighborhood were built in the early 1900s. Although the city has experienced occasional high water over the years, it was not until the 1990s, especially after the flooding caused by Hurricane Opal in 1995, that Chickamauga was able to justify a flood mitigation project.

The project got underway in earnest in 2000 with funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and the Georgia Emergency Management Agency. The City of Chickamauga offered residents along West Chickamauga Creek three choices: have their property bought out by the city, have their homes elevated, or do nothing. Most residents chose to elevate their homes.

"Approximately 50 elevations were completed in two neighborhoods near the creek," said John Culpepper, utilities manager for the City of Chickamauga. "We also bought out several homes and created a small park."

"The one-percent-chance flood level in the area of the project is 728 feet above sea level," Culpepper said. "The homes were elevated to 731 feet, as were all the utilities."

"Only two residents chose not to participate in the program," Culpepper said. "Everyone else was [very pleased] to participate."

The project has been beneficial to the residents. "It has improved their quality of life, no doubt about it. For anyone with a disability, we even put the little 'ol chair on the rail that you sit on and ride on up to the door rather than having to, say, roll a wheelchair up a long ramp," Culpepper said. He added, "there was even money in the program we could use in case a resident with a disability needed a new switchbox or a wheelchair-accessible bathroom or something. So it was a good project for all the people in these neighborhoods. A very good project."

Charles and Tina Hill agree. Although they did not live in their home before it was elevated, they did experience high water in the neighborhood once before. "That time, the water just barely reached the garage door," Charles said. "This time it actually got in there and you can still see where it came up to about the forth row of blocks in the space under the house."

"The creek went back down and the water under the house and in the garage all drained out in about 12 hours," Charles said. "We have some plastic sheeting we need to get out from under the house so that the dirt will dry faster."

"It's good, though," Tina said, "that the wet is all down there and in the garage. I'm really glad our house stayed dry."

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region IV**

State: **Georgia**

County: **Walker County**

City/Community: **Chickamauga**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts; Elevation, Structural**

Structure Type: **Wood Frame**

Activity/Project Start Date: **05/2000**

Activity/Project End Date: **05/2003**

Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**

Non FEMA Cost:

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Unknown**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**

Tested By Federal Disaster #: **No Federal Disaster specified**

Year First Tested: **2004**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: <http://www.floodsmart.gov>

Reference URL 2: <http://www.gema.state.ga.us/>

Main Points

- Many of the homes in the neighborhood were built in the early 1900s. Although they have experienced occasional high water over the years, it was not until the 1990s, especially the flooding caused by Hurricane Opal in 1995, that the City was able to justify a flood mitigation project.
- The funds enabled the City of Chickamauga to offer residents along West Chickamauga Creek three choices: have their property bought out by the city, have their homes elevated, or do nothing. Most residents chose to elevate their homes.
- The project has turned out very well for the residents.



The Hills are just one family that has been able to recently benefit from the Chickamauga home elevations.



John Culpepper points to a high water mark on a flagpole in a park where houses used to stand



Some older and handicapped folds were provided with chair lifts to ease entry into their homes.