



Small But Determined: Village of Rarden

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Scioto County, Ohio



Rarden, OH - "I'll tell you the difference it's made in my life," said Rarden resident Lelia Copas, "Whenever it rained at night at the old house, I'd wake up every hour or so and [lie] there listening for water rushing up out of the creek bed into our yard. Since we moved to higher ground, I sleep right through thunderstorms and don't even notice."

Rarden, population 176, is a classic "wide spot in the road" rural village that straddles an eight-block stretch of State Route 73 in western Scioto County, about 25 miles north of the Ohio River. Other than its proudly up-to-date volunteer fire station, the village's only distinguishing feature used to be its picturesque location in a natural hollow at the convergence of Rarden Creek and Jessie's Run. Today, there's also a creek-front village park.

In March 1997, when two days of non-stop downpours and runoff from surrounding hills turned both local streams into raging rivers, many of Rarden's 60-some households suffered basement flooding or worse. Road closures shut off the village from outside help for two days and loss of water and electric service made life miserable for most residents. But the danger and loss to Copas and her neighbors in a low-lying residential area near the creeks was infinitely worse. They awoke early on the second morning of storms barely in time to escape from a rapidly expanding "lake" of floodwater erupting from the creek bed. By the afternoon of March 2, the water had reached a depth of 10 feet - submerging every structure within 200 yards of the creek beds nearly to the level of first floor ceilings.

"We often had standing water on our lots when the rest of the village didn't, and every year or so after a really heavy rain the creeks would come up and there'd be water up near our houses for a day or two," said Copas. But when the March 1997 flood struck, Copas said it was a total shock..."we were just amazed at how much faster and higher the water rose than ever before, and how totally destroyed everything was when it finally went down again."

Copas and Village Mayor Anna Gardner, who was flooded out of her own home and lived for weeks in a second-story room above her garage, worked closely with county and local safety officials over the next several days to help re-open roads, get rescue and recovery aid to those who needed it and provide daily meals for the whole community at the fire house until utility service was restored.

Volunteers, including the Red Cross and a Boy Scout troop from Granville, Ohio, arrived within days of the flood to bring food and drinking water and help with clean up and debris removal. Most village residents who suffered damage, including Gardner, eventually were able to repair and restore their homes to livability with help from FEMA emergency grants and/or loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration. But post-disaster assessments found that the homes of Copas and her neighbors in the creek-front neighborhood were beyond repair.

In late March, Gardner and Copas received a phone call from the Scioto County Emergency Management Agency, inviting representatives from Rarden to attend a county-wide meeting with FEMA and OEMA staff to help local officials learn about mitigation and the HMGP grant process. After state and federal officials explained the program and invited any size community to apply, Copas said a number of other attendees at the meeting advised her and Gardner not to bother applying, because Rarden's heavily damaged area (less than a dozen properties) was too small a project for FEMA or the state to consider.

"I told the mayor that however small our chances were, getting a grant to buy out the creek-front property was the only chance our family and our neighbors would probably ever have to get a new start away from that dangerous area," said Copas.

"We knew what a desperate situation the flooded-out families were in, and we also knew we had a chance for the village to avoid future rescue and recovery operations and save thousands of tax dollars that would be wasted to repair or rebuild houses on that land," Gardner said. "We decided on the spot that we'd do everything possible to get a grant. In fact, we sat down and completed a pre-application form right there before we left the meeting."

During the next several months, Copas and Gardner spent hours seeking guidance over the phone and received several in-person visits from the OEMA Mitigation Branch to help complete the necessary cost-benefit calculations and supporting

paperwork for their grant proposal. "We had no experience in applying for federal grants, but we had a lot of determination and we kept taking it one step at a time...and eventually, with a lot of help, we got what we asked for," said Gardner.

An HMGP grant of \$158,000 and state/local funding totaling \$71,000 were approved for the acquisition of four homes, one mobile home and one vacant lot in the flood-prone creek front area.

All four homeowners used the proceeds to help buy existing homes or build new ones within the village, and the renter of the acquired mobile home retained her local job and found a similar unit in a safe area nearby.

All the flood-damaged structures on the mitigated property were demolished and cleared and the land was re-deeded as public green space. In 2000, community volunteers mowed and graded much of it for use as a park, and in 2001 various area civic and service organizations helped construct a walking track, basketball court and (removable) picnic tables which receive frequent use by residents of the village and surrounding area.

While there has been no recurrence of 1997-level flooding in Rarden since the mitigation project was completed, several lesser high-water events along Rarden Creek and Jessie Run have caused no danger to persons or appreciable property damage. Most importantly, Lelia Copas, her family and her neighbors are sleeping a lot better these days.

Activity/Project Location

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

FEMA Region: **Region V**

State: **Ohio**

County: **Scioto County**

City/Community: **Rarden**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Private**

Hazard Type: **Flooding**

Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts**

Activity/Project Start Date: **04/1997**

Activity/Project End Date: **Ongoing**

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

Funding Recipient: **Property Owner - Residential**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$229,000.00 (Estimated)**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal
Disaster? **Yes**

Federal Disaster #: **1164 , 03/04/1997**

Value Tested By Disaster? **Unknown**

Repetitive Loss Property? **Unknown**

Reference URLs

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

Reference URL 2: <http://www.ema.ohio.gov/>

Main Points

- In March 1997, when two days of non-stop downpours and runoff from surrounding hills turned both local streams into raging rivers, many of Rarden' s 60-some households suffered basement flooding or worse.
- Copas and Village Mayor Anna Gardner, who was flooded out of her own home and lived for weeks in a second-story room above her garage, worked closely with county and local safety officials over the next several days to help re-open roads, get rescue and recovery aid to those who needed it and provide daily meals for the whole community at the fire house until utility service was restored.
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