



## Liberating Independence

### Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

#### *Buchanan County, Iowa*

**Buchanan County, IA**—The scenic Wapsipinicon (“Wapsi”) River meanders into the City of Independence along low-laying banks that are shouldered by an historic rock mill, grassy parks with walking paths, and a few scattered homes. Independence was once on the receiving end of devastating floods; many had accepted flooding as a bittersweet part of living by the river. While townspeople were frequently scurrying to make decisions about moving to safer ground or staying to fight the floodwaters, city officials were seeking ways to secure the community and its resources. Answers came in the form of Federal grants designed to assist communities in acquiring properties that have been damaged severely or repetitively by floods.



In 1993, the city acquired funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) to start their flood-prone property acquisition initiative. Streets along the Wapsi River that were once lined with flood-prone homes and businesses were being transformed into green spaces. Folks that had tolerated years of repetitive flooding were being moved out of the floodplain to higher ground. As the acquisitions progressed, Independence took additional steps to protect its citizens from future flooding.

On June 7, 1999, the city established a new building code that exceeded the Base Flood Elevation (BFE) requirement. After enduring three disastrous floods in the 1990s, city officials realized the optimal way to protect homes along the river was to raise elevation requirements on new construction to three feet above BFE. Since then, the Wapsi River has flooded several times, proving the additional elevation mitigated further flood damage. Other mitigation measures have contributed significantly to reducing financial drain on the city.

With funding from the HMGP, Independence has acquired 84 homes, relocated two homes, and created three public parks. These projects were funded through five separate disasters over a period of 18 years for a total of \$3.4 million. Every dollar funded toward a FEMA project equals \$4 in future savings. In addition to saving money, numerous changes have been made that may enhance life for many people living along the river.

The city takes pride in the three parks developed on open green spaces provided by these acquisitions. Independence RV Park at the entrance to town has 42 campsites that are often full during the summer. The grounds of Veterans Memorial Park are located beside the historic rock mill in downtown Independence. This park features an army tank and a Howitzer cannon on display, and a large gazebo overlooking the river. Located on the other side of town is River Walk Park, which offers covered picnic areas, an amphitheater, walking trails, and playgrounds.

Each year on the Fourth of July, the community gathers in the park to enjoy the festivities and to celebrate its “Independence.” As the fireworks light the evening sky and reflect off the river, the community of Independence shares a new sense of liberty on safer, higher ground.

#### Activity/Project Location

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

FEMA Region: **Region VII**

State: **Iowa**

County: **Buchanan County**

City/Community: **Independence**

### Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public/Private Partnership**  
Hazard Type: **Flooding**  
Activity/Project Type: **Acquisition/Buyouts; Building Codes; Elevation, Structural**  
Activity/Project Start Date: **10/1990**  
Activity/Project End Date: **02/2008**  
Funding Source: **Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP); Mitigation Planning**  
Application/Project Number: **unknown**

### Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **\$3.00 (Estimated)**

### Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal Disaster? **Yes**  
Federal Disaster #: **879 , 09/06/1990**  
Federal Disaster Year: **1990**  
Value Tested By Disaster? **Yes**  
Tested By Federal Disaster #: **1420 , 06/19/2002; 1367 , 05/02/2001; 1518 , 05/25/2004; 1763 , 05/27/2008**  
Repetitive Loss Property? **Yes**

### Reference URLs

Reference URL 1: **<http://www.independenceia.com>**  
Reference URL 2: **<http://www.floodsmart.gov>**

### Main Points

No Main Points were entered.



Amphitheater at the River Walk Park.



Elevated house with three foot freeboard elevation along Wapsipinicon River.