



# FEMA

## *Floodplain Project Unites Community Playground Replaces Vulnerable Homes*

**Petersburg, IL** - On a hot day in late June of 2002, there was a flurry of activity in the floodplain of the Sangamon River in Petersburg, Illinois. It wasn't flood fighting this time. About 40 people, from high school freshmen to senior members of the community, gathered to connect brightly colored pieces into play equipment for a new pre-school playground in a shady spot where flood-prone buildings once stood.

That afternoon was a culmination of years of dedicated work. First, 30 flood-damaged structures were acquired and removed from the floodplain. Then the PORTA High School Community Problem Solvers (CmPS) spent four years raising funds and community support for the re-use project. Using the techniques learned from the Problem Solvers organization, the group developed and implemented plans for an approved re-use of City-owned land purchased in the buyout program, obtaining high praise from IEMA and IDNR for the group's creativity, initiative and interaction of the whole community of Petersburg.

Just a few miles from where Abraham Lincoln spent his early adult years, the Sangamon River has repeatedly flooded the City of Petersburg. Homes in the older section of town nearest the river sustained damage and declining property values from flooding in 1979, 1981, 1983, 1990, 1993, and 1994. After the flood of 1994 in which one person died, FEMA and IEMA authorized the use of Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funds for a buyout of floodprone properties in Petersburg. A total of 43 units were acquired and the structures removed at a project cost of \$1,124,589, with FEMA HMGP covering \$818,252 and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources/Office of Water Resources (IDNR/OWR) contributing \$305,201 and the city paying \$1,135.

The re-use of vacated land from acquisition projects must follow strict guidelines in abiding by deed restriction language. Basically, no new structures can be introduced.

"So many communities who participate in buyouts are locked into the idea that open space means just green grass," said Ron Davis, IEMA Hazard Mitigation Specialist. "In Petersburg, the kids started thinking about other options and took it upon themselves to make it into something else."

Throughout the process of brainstorming for ideas on how to re-use the vacated lots, the group came up with options that would be appropriate for the floodplain. They eventually decided on a flower garden and playground. The group raised \$16,000 through numerous fundraising activities, including the "Decorate an Abe" contest and auction that involved businesses in town decorating a cutout of the area's historic figure. They delivered presentations in Springfield, Chicago, and Charlotte, North Carolina, for the annual meeting of the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM). They received a \$50,000 grant from the State of Illinois, and Floodplain Managers from around the nation donated over \$1,000 to their project. The \$67,000 in grants and fundraising covered the cost of picnic tables, grills, benches, playground equipment, and a fountain and decorative brick path for the garden.



**Menard County,  
Illinois**



### **Quick Facts**

Sector:

**Private**

Cost:

**\$134,000.00 (Estimated)**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Acquisition/Buyouts**

Primary Funding:

**Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**