



FEMA

On Safer Ground New Secure Housing Program

Toa Baja, PR - When Hurricane Georges hit Puerto Rico in Sept. 1998, residents of low-lying areas of the municipality of Toa Baja, including Fernando Flores, had already endured yearly seasonal flooding. To relocate families whose homes were destroyed or damaged by flooding, especially those affected by Hurricane Georges, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico created the New Secure Housing Program (NSHP). Many Toa Baja residents were included in this program, using funds provided by the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.

Fernando Flores and his family lived in a low-lying area of Toa Baja. La Plata River and a nearby creek would flood the area and its main roads, isolating the community for several days. The families had to wait for the floodwaters to recede in order to receive any assistance.

"When we lived next to the creek, between 1973 and 2002," said Mr. Flores, "water would rise as much as 3 to 4 feet into our home. This would happen as often as once or twice a year. The cost of replacing appliances, furniture, clothes and other personal items was over \$5,000 each time. Every time we flooded, we lost a part of ourselves."

The residents of this sector were pleased to discover the Office of the Governor of Puerto Rico had proposed the implementation of the NSHP and that they would be included among the families to be relocated to a safer area. The voluntary NSHP Toa Baja project, now called Urbanizacion Campanillas (Campanillas Subdivision), relocated 223 families out of harm's way. After the project was completed in 2002, the Municipality of Toa Baja demolished the acquired structures and cleaned up the surrounding area. Only 20-25 families decided to stay in the few structures remaining in Villa del Sol.

During the previous two years, Toa Baja residents endured two significant rainstorm events, major flooding in Nov. 2003 and Tropical Storm Jeanne in 2004. Both times families in Campanillas lived a different experience.

"We are now living in a concrete house, at a higher elevation," added Mr. Flores, "During Tropical Storm Jeanne, no water reached our house, and the water that did come down the streets, quickly flowed out of the subdivision. I know the streets and homes are higher and have better drainage, so we feel much safer."

Viable voluntary programs, initiated on a local level and funded by FEMA, can work wonders to assist individuals and families to move out of harm's way and relocate to a safer area. Now that they feel safer from the threat of rising floodwaters, the 223 families residing in Urbanizacion Campanillas are working on neighborhood programs to reflect ownership pride in their new homes, including efforts to maintain the subdivision as clean, attractive and in good working order.



Toa Baja Municipio,
Puerto Rico



Quick Facts

Year:
1996

Sector:
Public

Cost:
\$16,667,917.00 (Actual)

Primary Activity/Project:
Acquisition/Buyouts

Primary Funding:
Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)