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Two years later, some normalcy returns to river communities

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BY STEVE MCCONNELL (STAFF WRITER) / PUBLISHED: SEPTEMBER 8, 2013

Bob Ell built his dream cottage in Exeter Twp. because of the Susquehanna River that usually snakes silently along a bend through this rural Wyoming County community.

"We're here because of the river, not in spite of it," said Mr. Ell, 88, on a recent afternoon when sunlight spilled from a nearly cloudless sky into his living room and the river just

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outside his home slipped calmly along the edge of his lush green yard. "I think this is God's forgotten acre."

The serenity he built with his own hands was ravaged two years ago today when the river welcomed itself into his home, pushed beyond its banks by the one-two punch of Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee.

The storms caused one of the worst floods in the region since Hurricane Agnes swept through the state in 1972.

They displaced tens of thousands of residents and decimated communities in Luzerne, Wyoming and Susquehanna counties.

The normally placid Susquehanna spilled millions of gallons of water into towns like Exeter Twp., Duryea, West Pittston and Shickshinny, uprooted dozens of homes, ripped out bridges, destroyed streets and closed many mainstay businesses, some for



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Chris Kelly Blog: Christopher J. Kelly, is the Scranton Times Tribune Columnist.

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weeks, some for forever.

Because of the storms, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and state EMA distributed \$584 million disaster-related relief statewide to individuals and families.

In Luzerne County, they distributed \$32 million; Wyoming County, \$8.6 million; and Susquehanna County, \$1.8 million.

And, it pulled many residents lives into an undesired tailspin that laden them with overwhelming debt and forced some to abandon their homes.

Mr. Ell said he was lucky, despite the river touching the edge of the second last step of the stairwell leading to the second floor in his cottage.

The stilts that lifted his cottage eight feet above ground were not high enough to stop the rush of water through nearly all of the first floor of his home.

But, it was not swept away, like several others in Exeter Twp.

He did not need to make major repairs. Flood insurance helped, too, and a \$1,400 FEMA grant.



Image Gallery for Two years later, some normalcy returns to river communities

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Chris Kelly Blog: Lock him up! Lock him up! Lock him...

At best, Michael Flynn is a bad liar. At worst, he's a traitor. (read more)

Wechsler, Rogan announce council re-election bids

Two more incumbent Democratic city councilmen announced they will seek re-election, saying their first-term work contributed to the city's financial

But, it took months to scrape off the mud that the Susquehanna slathered on his cedar walls, that today give off a strong, sweet scent of wood, masking the devastation from two years ago.

"We all have bad days and so does the river," said Mr. Ell, a retired alumni director at King's College in Wilkes-Barre. "I was very fortunate."

Today, Tropical Storm Lee and the rising Susquehanna are a distant memory for him.

All is well - for now.

The river is calm. He watches the news in an easy chair, snoozing from time to time when it suits him. He occasionally heads outside to admire the river or to catch a glimpse of a bald eagle soaring above the waterway.

Across the road from Mr. Ell's home, Kim McClintock and his wife, Theresa, sat in their kitchen remembering when they had to coax their two cats to get into a canoe as the rising waters of the Susquehanna completely surrounded their home.

They are able to laugh today when they think back to when their home was literally an island onto itself.

"We're on an island," Mrs. McClintock remembered calling out to him two years ago, a statement that soon turned into a unshakable realization for her husband that time was running out and he should wade through the waters to fetch their canoe.



recovery. (read more)



Son of former Penn State assistant coach Jerry Sandusky arrested on child sex charges

BELLEFONTE — One of Jerry Sandusky's adult sons faces multiple charges of sexual offenses involving children, more than five years after the former Penn

The river ended up leaving its mark around the middle of their first floor windows - a black line composed of mud and a stew of other substances it swallowed up as it swelled and spilled its contents onto everything in its way.

It's not the first time his home has been greeted by an unwanted deluge. His great-grandfather named the place, "Wanoka," which Mr. McClintock said is an Native American word that loosely translates as "running water."

"And boy did we get it," Mr. McClintock said with a laugh. "The place was a total mess."

Ever since it became the family homestead in 1911, they have been forced to pick up the pieces several times. The list of storms is long, including Agnes, said Mr. McClintock, who was a local radio disc jockey.

This time was no different.

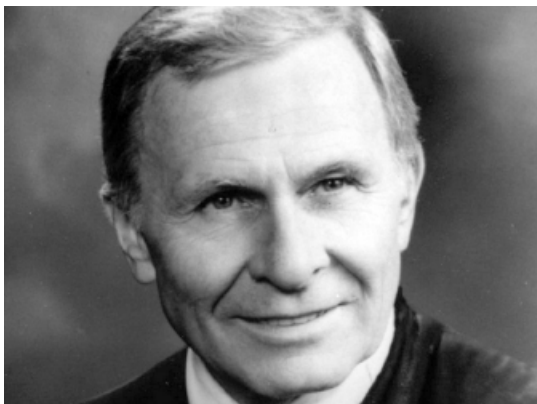
The river dropped two inches of mud on their floors, enough to leave behind deep footprints of those who walked through the home. And, it ripped away their porch steps, sending them on an underwater journey to a destination several blocks away.

But like Mr. Ell, they were somewhat fortunate.

Their home was not torn off its foundation. They moved most of their possessions upstairs before the water started seeping inside.

But, it took them hundreds of hours to wipe away the river's dirty smear and restore their way of life.

State assistant coach was himself first arrested. (read more)



Federal judge Edwin Kosik will no longer hear cases because of health issues

After more than 30 years on the bench, senior U.S. District Judge Edwin M. Kosik will no longer hear cases because of health issues. (read more)

Historical Architecture Review Board OKs firehouse facade fix

The city's Historical Architecture Review Board unanimously approved an application Monday night from

Besides, a few small finishing touches, they are almost fully recovered. Flood insurance helped them get back on their feet, Mr. McClintock said.

Other homeowners in Exeter Twp. weren't so fortunate.

The river's current ripped their homes from their foundations. Now, there are trailers sitting on top of those foundations.

The West Falls section of the township used to be so clustered with homes that "you knew what the guy next door was having for dinner," Mr. Ell said.

In Susquehanna County, recovery is nearly complete, but there are still loose ends.

Six or so homeowners are in the process of having their homes bought by FEMA, according to county EMA figures. Communities hit hard by the flood, like Hallstead and Great Bend, have for the most part put the flood behind them. A shopping plaza in Hallstead that was underwater has returned to being a bustling hub of small town business like it was before Tropical Storm Lee.


Like West Falls, a neighborhood in Duryea also shrunk after the flood. The Lackawanna River spilled over an earthen dike and through a gap in it, where the waters poured through a cemetery and down Chittenden Street.

The neighborhood - where the sound of shovels scrapping sewage and garbage off the street was a constant reminder of the flood for weeks after the waters receded - has returned to some semblance of normalcy.



Scranton officials to reconstruct a leaning decorative parapet atop the Fire Department's Mulberry Street headquarters. (read more)



 Windy weather doesn't spoil a good walk

Monday was hardly the coldest day of the winter, but the wind did its best to make it feel that way — as evidenced by

Though, several homes are now vacant - windows and doors boarded over. And, an irate sentiment persists.

Residents sued the borough, claiming the river "shot through a two-block gap" in the dike that was "never completed."

Council President Audrey Marcinko said the state Department of Environmental Protection and Army Corps of Engineers were supposed to plug the gap years ago and even approved the project in 2001.

It stalled.

Lois Morreale, borough manager, said it is going out to bid very soon, funded by DEP.

Tom Carter, 40, blames the gap for flooding the first floor of his home.

"No one mentioned the 1,500 foot gap up the road," the Chittenden Street resident said.

"With the flood you spent all of your savings and now you got to deal with the debt."

The Lackawanna River would have still spilled over the dike despite the gap, Ms. Marcinko said.

The Lackawanna drains into the Susquehanna. As the Susquehanna rose, the Lackawanna had little opportunity to drain and so rose higher, too.

"It was eerie. No lights for weeks and weeks in the homes, like a ghost town," Ms. Marcinko said. "There's still things that need to be done but people just don't have the money."

these pedestrians in downtown Scranton. (read more)



Penn State scholarship roster breakdown: Special teams

This is another area where the Nittany Lions weren't very good for a few years before James Franklin and his staff kind of worked the team into a very palatable situation for the future. (read more)

Predicting the 2017 RailRiders Opening Day Roster: Starting Pitchers

It's hard to believe but New York Yankees pitchers and catchers arrive at George M. Steinbrenner Field in Tampa,

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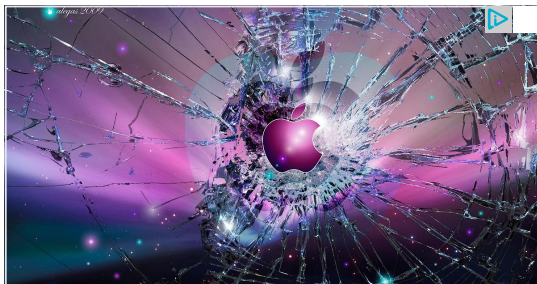
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