

Doings Sun-Times Media:

1. Clip One

"Westchester residents still waiting for answers" – story about aftermath of Westchester flood this summer

Westchester residents still waiting for answers

July 30, 2010

By KEVIN KENEALY Contributor

At the time of her phone interview, Flo Milas took a break from cleaning her Westchester basement that was hit from a foot of water. The night before, Milas attended a special town hall meeting, along with some thousand other residents to talk about their flooding problems.

"Overall, I'm so fed up with the flooding. The one constant thing is that people want answers and the town can't give them right now. I think that's why there's a lot of unrest," Milas said.

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Westchester Village President Sam Pulia address questions and concerns during a special village meeting concerning the recent flooding that affected the village. The meeting was held in the cafeteria of the Westchester Middle School, with people overflowing into the school's gymnasium and outside of the school.

(Dan Luedert/Staff Photographer)

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Steve Torello voices his frustration during a special village meeting concerning the recent flooding that affected the village. The meeting was held in the cafeteria of the Westchester Middle School, with people overflowing into the school's gymnasium

and outside of the school.

(Dan Luedert/Staff Photographer)

PHOTO GALLERY



- [Flood aftermath \(updated\)](#)

Village President Sam Pulia declared the situation a state emergency on July 24, followed by Cook County declaring the area a state disaster area. Even though the rains have stopped and the water has receded, the village is in this waiting period to try to get funds from Washington D.C. to help residents salvage their lost items.

For a resident like Milas that would mean a basement rug, a washer and a dryer, and a hot water heater, just to name a few. At the special meeting, residents were asked to fill out a form of what they lost in the flooding and turn it back into the village hall as soon as possible.

"Some stuff is replaceable, such as furniture. But some people lost photos and mementos that they had for 30 years," said Trustee Neil Boyle. "We're trying to get FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) assistance right now so we can start writing some checks."

According to the office of U.S. Rep. Danny Davis, D-7th, Chicago, the coming of those checks looks promising. Yet, Tumia Romero, Davis' deputy chief of staff did say a lot of it depends on how long Washington takes to respond.

"Chances are very good right now," Romero said. "The Illinois delegation is working with the governor's office to put together a letter to send to the president asking him to send federal funds. Depending on D.C., it could take a month, a day, two weeks."

While waiting, Westchester remains in the clean up stage. Boyle said there are Waste Management bins all over the place for residents to dispose of their damaged drywall or carpet or whatever it may be.

Immediately following the flooding, Westchester's Fire Department teamed up with Hillside's using the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System. Westchester Fire Chief Richard Belmonte said there were 52 people evacuated from their homes between 1 a.m. and 7:47 p.m. July 24 when the response occurred.

Belmonte said there were 79 vehicles and 202 personnel between Westchester and Hillside that included boats to transport people out of their homes. There were 3,500

clean-up kits distributed by the American Red Cross during this time as well. Belmonte said he never saw anything like the disaster in Westchester.

"In my 32 years as a firefighter, this was the worst flooding I've ever seen," Belmonte said.

Flo Milas' daughter-in-law, Debbie Milas, was also at the meeting and was quick to say that Westchester did a great job responding to the emergency.

"They were really good in responding to the flooding; Pulia was the first mayor ever to declare a state of emergency and the village did a wonderful job cleaning up. They're trying their best, but I'd still like to know that it's not going to happen again," Debbie Milas said.

Both Debbie and Flo Milas want to know what the real problem is. Flo says that even though the village has had water before, it seems Westchester seems to be getting hit progressively more and more flooding. Debbie wants to know what can be done about the flooding issue now and not five years from now. Debbie and Flo thought there may be a problem with the village's sewer system; however, this is something that Village Manager Stan Urban denied.

"It is not a sewer problem. We got 8 inches of rain. Bellwood, Berwyn, Broadview, Brookfield also got hit bad so it's not just a sewer issue," Urban said.

Boyle seconded this by pointing out that along with Salt Creek overflowing, Addison Creek overflowed for the first time in history, and the village's 60 million gallon retention pond overflowed.

"If we got 1 inch of rain, it would have been something to look at. I understand the frustration. I've been through this before. Now it's time to clean up. The people of Westchester will rebound from this," Boyle said.

As to when the village will rebound from this is unclear, however. Urban said it is too early to tell when Westchester will be back on its feet. Boyle did say that a number of residents are already volunteering to repair the village themselves. He said a number of churches are organizing clean-ups throughout the village.

Flo Milas admitted she didn't know what the answer was. However, before ending the interview, she commented that she hopes more people come out for future town hall meetings.

"I would hope a lot of people at last night's meeting would come to other town meetings to find out what's going on," Flo Milas said.

2.) Clip Two

“First woman officer now police chief in Westchester”

First woman officer now police chief in Westchester

July 21, 2010

By KEVIN KENEALY Contributor

April Padalick started as the first woman police officer in Westchester in 1983. Twenty-seven years later, she was being sworn in as Westchester's chief of police.

"As a former colleague of hers, I am pleased as punch that April is the chief of police," said Village President Sam Pulia. "I think that she is going to do an outstanding job."

Padalick presented her ideas for what she looks to bring as the chief.

"The words I'd like my administration to focus on are teamwork and accountability and we have a lot of progressive ideas we want to start instituting," Padalick said. "There will be a few changes that will be made, but it's all for the betterment of the citizens of Westchester."

Even though she has now been chief for about a week and a half, that doesn't mean Padalick has stopped being an officer. At the 20th annual Westchester Fest, Padalick made an arrest for a possession of a controlled substance.

Among those in attendance at the meeting was longtime friend Sgt. Therese Thompson from Lemont, who said Padalick is one of the most competent, confident all around cops out there.

"The fact that she was their first woman's officer and the only one for quite some time in the community and finally got to this level is awesome and Westchester's definitely going to benefit from that," Thompson said.

Thompson met Padalick as a DARE officer in the 1980s at a conference. She said anyone who meets Padalick knows of her outgoing personality and from the conference, the two just hit it off. She said they have been friends ever since.

When Padalick first started, Lt. Stephen Stabosz was her training officer. He said the experience to train Westchester's first female officer was an interesting one.

"At that time there weren't a lot of female officers on police departments at all. She was very good, she fit right in and obviously she made sergeant and now chief. She did a wonderful job how I trained her, learned from that and became an exceptional police officer," Stabosz said.

In response to the support from her friends, Padalick said she wouldn't be where she is if it weren't for the friends she has, some of whom have known her for 35 plus years. She said the experience is nothing short of overwhelming.

"It's very exciting. I'm thrilled to be in this position and I'm looking forward to take on the challenges and responsibilities while serving Westchester," Padalick said.

Clip Three

3) "Homeless does not equal helpless"

Homeless does not equal hopeless

Posted: Monday, October 15, 2007 12:00 am

Homeless does not equal hopeless Kevin Kenealy / Pounce Editor The Daily Eastern News | 0 comments

John Schwab is a Beatles fan. John Schwab is a rummy player. John Schwab is a guest at PADS in Mattoon, where he often stays overnight.

PADS is an overnight homeless shelter and Schwab is one of three people staying this night; eleven have come to just enjoy the salad and lasagna. Guests wait outside until about 6:50 p.m., then file in and set their IDs in one of two slots that read "Overnight" or "Meal Only."

But Schwab, 57, said he is not ashamed to come. In fact, Schwab comes voluntarily and said he has never considered himself homeless at any point in his life.

"A homeless person encompasses a variety of definitions. You can be homeless by choice, by force or by handicap," Schwab said. "Most people that come here are a lot of transients, they stay and they go. You have to look at the individual, the definition of why they're here."

According to John Heldman, executive director of PADS, the actual homeless person that comes into the shelter is an average of 42 years, has graduated high school, and earns about \$800 a month. Heldman said that Schwab doesn't quite fit the mold at the shelter in that he is very aware of everything that is going on around him.

The full-time worker at a Mattoon Hardee's who has served in the military for 14 years said he has nothing bad to say about a place like PADS.

"The staff is very friendly, and is well-qualified to deal with all different types of people, people who are in transition, such as myself," he said.

One of the members of this staff is PADS worker Ron White, who has been at PADS for about four and a half years, or about two months after it opened. However, White has been helping the homeless before his time at PADS.

Ron and his wife, Debbie, have been feeding and letting the homeless stay at their home for a number of years, believing that if he shows them love it will be hard for people to take it out on them.

"They will try harder not to drink or take drugs when you show them your love," said White.

Then when White was in between jobs, he decided to come to PADS to volunteer and after helping out for about a month and a half, he was offered to work the night shift.

On average, Heldman said there are seven people that stay overnight and while there are 16 beds and 18 mattresses at the shelter, John said PADS has been at full capacity at least three times.

One of the challenges that White has faced is making sure the guests comply with the rules of the shelter. Certain rules include making everyone smoke outside, having men and women sleep in separate living areas, and making sure guests do laundry within a certain time frame.

"We had one guy barred because he had been drinking and he had busted the window and was not acting right," White said. "Other people because they constantly broke normal rules around here."

Susan Coffman, president of the PADS board, said a person is usually barred if he or she is perceived to be a threat to the safety of others, has caused disturbances in the community, is a known felon or sex offender, or for other serious reasons.

White also said that certain rules should be more flexible or changed, as in the case if someone works late and can't come to the shelter until midnight.

"It's wrong to say that person can't take a shower or wash their clothes because they weren't here at the time they were supposed to wash them," White said.

Coffman said that the board of directors has passed a policy allowing those who work late to shower if needed as long as they respect those who are sleeping.

She said the board does work to handle such cases individually and does work to try to meet the guest's needs.

Unlike the 24-hour shelter that used to reside in Charleston, Mattoon's shelter stays open from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. with the exception of luncheons 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Friday. PADS also has a 90-day stay policy, where after 90 days of stay a guest is encouraged to find a new home (depending on if case management grants a 30-day extension and if the board grants this extension.)

Also, case management is on a case-by case basis, said Coffman.

"Some instances guests are not granted extensions for various reasons and some are granted prolonged extensions," she said.

While Heldman said he's never had anyone stay the full 90 days, he did say that there were about 1,500 days of shelter at PADS by late August, in contrast to last year's 1,857 days of nights provided.

White doesn't keep homeless at his home as much as he used to, but instead tells them about places like PADS, a place that he said that if it didn't exist, more people would be getting into trouble.

"More of them would be getting in trouble again instead of staying out of trouble and that's the main thing," White said. "They'd find a place to stay, whether it be out in the woods, under a viaduct or whatever. They'd find a place to eat, around dumpsters and stuff, around restaurants and find food that looks like it's still OK to eat."

As far as his job goes, White says he knows how they want to be treated.

"I don't treat neither one of them like a criminal, like I'm better than they are," White said. "I treat them like they're just the same as me. I've been in jail before; I've had problems drinking before. I've been down and out before; I know what it's like. I know how they want to be treated."

While doing laundry in late September, a volunteer came up to Schwab and asked if any jobs were open at Hardee's.

"Mention my name: John Schwab," he said.

