



FEMA

Village Locals Reflect Moving Was Best Flood Protection

Village of Soldiers Grove, WI – In August 2007, the biggest flood in the history of Soldiers Grove came roaring through the village. The Kickapoo River quickly topped the levees, and water didn't recede for about 10 days. Years earlier the center to the town had been moved.

Residents experienced floods in 1907, 1912, 1917, 1935, 1951, and the "big one" in 1978. From 1969 to 2007, the state had 25 nationally declared flood disasters in 38 years. The flood of record in 2007 inflicted the worst damage in the state just 10 miles downstream in Gays Mills.

"The Kickapoo can turn into a wild river. I don't know how we escaped all the floods without loss of life. We had a lot of good people, fire crews, and emergency management crews out there working evacuations and rescues," stated Jerry Moran, Crawford County Sheriff. "Each time there was very little advance warning. People woke up at night with three to four inches of water already in their homes."

Local debate about what to do about the flooding began to swell in the mid-60s when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposed an upstream dam and a new levee for the village. The costs to the village exceeded their ability to pay. The unprecedented move of their downtown, surrounded on three sides by the river, to higher ground began to make financial sense.

Environmentalists were fighting against the Corps over the dam, and the maintenance of the levee was going to cost the village nearly all of their annual tax revenues. By 1975, a small Comprehensive Employment and Training Act grant paid for a relocation coordinator. By 1976 the village took the unprecedented move of passing a resolution that supported relocation to avoid future flood disasters.

The flood of July 1978 made things happen. On July 7, 1978 a federal disaster declaration made federal funds available to flood-proof the village. Local planners convinced state and federal officials moving the town was the best flood-proofing and eventually received their first federal grant of \$900,000 from HUD's Community Development Block Grant to get the project moving – acquire flood prone properties, clear the area, demolish old properties, and rebuild the town uphill.

By 1983 the \$6 million relocation project was done. According to Hirsch, in 1979 the village wanted to "help the US reduce its dependency on foreign oil" so the village incorporated solar heating in the new buildings, subsequently dubbed Solar Village.

"Since the buildings have solar heating they are insulated a lot better. If I get a good day of sun, I'll get three days of heat. It's clean. I've never had to paint because of dirt from the system," Young noted.

Locals have witnessed a moderate population growth to over 600 with new businesses and the expansion of older ones. "If Soldiers Grove stayed in the floodplain, it would have been a stagnant community; it would have still existed, but stagnant. All the new businesses would have not happened if we were still over there," Moran stated.

"The recent August 2007 flood devastation reinforced that we did the right thing. I don't ever want to go through another flood like 1978," added Young.



Crawford County, Wisconsin



Quick Facts

- Year: **1978**
- Sector: **Public/Private Partnership**
- Cost: **\$6,000,000.00 (Estimated)**
- Primary Activity/Project: **Flood-proofing**
- Primary Funding: **Local Sources**