

## In it for the long haul

By Melissa Regennitter of the Muscatine Journal



OAKVILLE, Iowa — Rubber boots are both a common sight and a necessity in Oakville, where many residents and volunteers are shoveling debris out of windows, spraying mud off the ground and tearing insulation out of homes and businesses.

Some of the town's people are ready to start rebuilding after floodwater that topped the levee on June 14 receded — but that means tearing down first.

"They have to come register with us and we will get a crew out to them as soon as possible," said Perry Onorio, 26, an employee and volunteer from the Washington Conservation Corps., Olympia, Wash. The Washington Conservation Corps. is an agency under the umbrella of the AmeriCorps, which helps rebuild communities.

Residents must get on a waiting list to register with volunteers at the relief headquarters, which is being run by faith-based and other volunteers. Onorio was heading up the site Tuesday.

Onorio said the weekdays are slower for volunteer help but on the weekends, when people are off work, the town is flooded with volunteers tearing ruined items out of residents' homes.

"There are people from faith-based organizations all across the country here helping, and of course the Red Cross and others from surrounding communities," he said, "But we could use more."

Joe Whitaker, 37, stopped by the relief headquarters to fill out a request for volunteer assistance. He then went to his home at 506 Second St. and unlocked the door to view thick mud and mold inside. He needs a crew to help him move all of his belongings out.

"This is the first time I've seen it since the water went down," he said, as his 5-foot 7-inch frame entered a doorway that showed a distinct watermark just near the top of his head.

He has joint custody of his three children and the family lost nearly everything except the appliances he managed to haul away before the floodwaters invaded his home.

Melody Crow, 52, has lived in her home at 311 Second St. for 30 years. Her family helped her gut the inside of the house so she can eventually rebuild. Crow took her memories from the walls before the flood, including photos and keepsakes, but she is not allowed to take anything now, which means she can't even take her clothing.

"I definitely want to come back. These people in the neighborhood are my family," Crow said.

Crow's sister, Sherry Moore, 50, came to Oakville from Kansas City, Mo., to help with cleanup. She said Crow has always been a giving person and she felt this was the time to give back. She also felt deep sorrow for her sister's family because they did not have flood insurance and were only \$4,000 away from paying the home off.

"We keep hearing rumors that they aren't going to let the people rebuild. It's time they let us know what's going on. We are doing all of this work and still don't know if it's for nothing," she said while standing near a pile of the Crows' muddy belongings that had been ripped from the home.

Pastor Scott Smith of Wapello, Morning Sun and Oakville United Methodist Church, said some people are just now seeing their house for the first time.

"Coming back is just an absolute shock," Smith said, adding that recovery will take years after cleanup, including rebuilding and emotional care.

"We are here for the long haul."

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#### Where to go to volunteer or ask for help

- Wapello Ambulance building at 400 U.S. Highway 61, Wapello.
- The Solid Rock Baptist Church, 14041 Locust St., Wapello, located off U.S. Highway 61 on the south side of town. Phone 319-523-5320.

#### More information

- Residents and business owners affected by the flood are strongly encouraged to apply for federal aid at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster recovery center located at the Briggs Civic Center in Wapello.
- Environmental Protection Agency workers are picking up white goods (washing machines, refrigerators), E-debris (televisions, stereos, computers), and household hazardous materials (chemicals, fertilizers, bleach, paints). These items must be placed near the curb of the public road to be collected.
- Louisa County Sheriff Curt Braby said Hewitt Excavation will begin picking up large debris items such as furniture on Friday, July 11. Braby said a comprehensive debris management plan for rural areas of the County is still being formulated.
- County Road H-22 remains closed as the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers continues construction of a temporary levee.