

HELPING RESIDENTS STAY AFLOAT

Meyer Memorial Trust, ShoreBank Enterprise Cascadia, and the Community Action Team partner to repair hundreds of homes ravaged by the late 2007 floods in the Pacific Northwest

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As back-to-back storms pounded the Pacific Northwest in December 2007, leaving hundreds of thousands without power and 5 dead, the mountain town of Vernonia, OR – northwest of Portland and at the heart of the storm – was left isolated due to landslides that blocked most roads and extreme flooding that severed phone lines. Hundreds of families in Vernonia were displaced from their homes. Over two years later, many are still trying to find stability and higher ground.

The Community Action Team (CAT), a local community based nonprofit, is helping flood victims to do just that. Through their Community Investment Program, the organization has aided in housing rehabilitation, weatherization, and development for those displaced by the floods. So far, the program has helped repair over 140 homes in the town. According to Jim Tierney, Deputy Director of the Community Action Team, “that number doesn't really tell the whole story, however” and there is still much work to be done. The program requires a variety of services beyond just constructing new homes, including social and financial services to help people get back on their feet. In one example, the CAT team helped a 60-yr old woman, whose manufactured home was destroyed by the flood and who had a history of mental health problems, repair and sell her property and find new rental housing. The CAT team also worked with the County's mental health system to help reinstate her drug regime and manage her grief and mental anguish. At one point in the process, Mr. Tierney said the CAT team used part of a HOME grant from the state of Oregon and “borrowed \$40,000, [to] pick the [her new rental] home up, turning it sideways onto a single lot, and refurbished it inside and out.”

CAT has helped the City and County apply for over \$8 million in federal grants to buyout and elevate flooded homes. To provide interim construction financing for this part of the flood recovery, Meyer Memorial Trust, a foundation created by the late Fred G. Meyer, provided CAT a program-related investment in the form of a \$400,000 loan guarantee. While the majority of these projects will ultimately be funded by FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grants and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, the delay in the distribution of those funds (typically 2-6 months) would have left CAT with a large funding gap and bills to pay. The PRI from the Meyer Trust allows ShoreBank Enterprise Cascadia to make a \$400,000 loan to CAT allowing them to proceed with the lending necessary to keep construction going while they wait for payments. In addition to the loan guarantee, the Meyer Trust provided CAT a \$96,000 grant to pay interest and fees on the loan for the CDBG portion of the project.

As the work continues, there is more to be done to help this community. According to Mr. Tierney, “our downtown was 50% flooded. This is requiring us to reorient how we will grow. As a first step, we are working to move our senior center, health clinic and food bank (all of which were flooded) to higher ground.” That said, at least one client, the 60-yr old woman, is in her new home; and Mr. Tierney says “appears to be thriving.”