

but not forgotten

Hoosier town saves levee

THE last thing Kerry Graves, Ralph Harris and Randy Koenig want credit for is saving the McGinnis levee in Greene County. A half-mile stretch of sandbags, three deep and three wide, grace the top of a section of the levee. It's 21.6 miles long and protects 15,400 acres, including grain bins and farmsteads. The levee also protects the south side of Sandborn on the Knox County line, and western Westphalia.

Built by farmers after the 1913 flood, the levee was completed in 1922. A commission was established. The current president, Harris, is thankful that although hundreds of acres were soaked, the levee held back the west fork of the White River.

Just three days before the flood, a tornado ripped through

Bloomfield. Then endless rain on Saturday and water from the north headed that way. The group kept a close vigil on the levee. By Sunday morning, they knew something had to be done quickly.

By 7 a.m. Sunday, sandbagging began. These three, other farmers, people in the community and even those who wouldn't be affected by flooding pitched in. It was humid and water was waist-deep, but no one complained, Harris reports. Prisoners from the Carlisle state prison worked alongside. Some had already been up the previous night, sandbagging in another county, but were willing to work as long as needed. Harris appreciated their hard work and polite attitudes, and feels they owe a lot to them.

Help came from everywhere. Local restaurants brought food;

equipment was donated. Graves hauled two loads of rock in his semi. People with Gators and four-wheelers helped take sandbags along the levee. Where water was too deep, human chains passed sandbags along. They worked until Monday night, when another storm forced them to stop.

"No one slept well that night," Graves says. Harris compared it to soldiers during war, who slept through the night while the battle raged, only to find the flag still waving in the morning. "The levee held, and I was amazed," Harris says.

Efforts resumed on Tuesday, and by then, they knew they were succeeding. Although



seepage water spread over fields, it was minor compared to what might have happened.

As Harris reflects, he notes the entire community worked unselfishly together to weather the storm.

TIRED BUT HAPPY: Kerry Graves (far left), Randy Koenig and Ralph Harris were just three of hundreds of farmers and others who helped save a Greene County levee from collapsing.

Great attitudes help brothers survive floods

JIM Leonard and his brother, Wally, farm low-lying ground south of Martinsville. They've dealt with minor flooding before and suffered through a significant flood in the 1960s; but they had never seen anything compared to this.

A week after the flooding began, the stench of stagnant water still hung in the humid air. Watermarks, some over 6 feet high, left their signature on barns.

Jim's daughter's home sat deserted as water once lapped several feet deep inside the house. Huge piles of debris were crammed against buildings. Amazingly, their cattle survived the flood, although Jim boasted, "They sure did some good floating."

Their biggest issue was 20,000 bushels of corn in grain bins that were now soaking wet. "The corn is packed so hard it's like trying to remove cement," reported Jim. They mixed it with dry corn and raked out what they could with hand tools.

One tractor suffered damage, but the Leonards hope to get it going again. Two LP gas tanks littered a field. Also rearranged were huge logs and fertilizer tanks. The



STILL SMILING: Attired for the occasion with high-top boots, Wally (left) and Jim Leonard smile, despite the devastation all around them.

brothers figure that during the weeklong flooding, two to three creeks spread water over their fields.

There were positive notes amongst the disaster. They hadn't applied nitrogen yet. Jim smiled and said that you can't worry about your job, while Wally claimed that worry only leads to a heart attack.

Farming is what these guys do, and they're full of tenacity and good spirits. As of late June, they were hoping to replant. Yet as they stood and looked around, an outright downpour hit again. It only added to the misery. Yet these two men just smiled, shook their heads and simply went on with their work.

The county fair must go on!

FLOOD brochures sat on top of the receptionist desk at the temporary home of the Johnson County Extension Service. Ironically, no one needed the brochures worse than the staff.

The first week of June, just over a month before the county fair, the Extension office in Franklin buzzed with excitement. One week later, personnel were misplaced because of severe flooding that careened 6 feet deep into their office, shoving desks through walls, and knocking one wall into another, like dominoes.

"Every piece of paper was lost, even the paper in the file cabinets had swollen so full of water that we couldn't get drawers open," says Dave Smith, Extension ag educator. There were no 4-H manuals left, no equipment, and 4-H'ers would soon learn they needed to redo many forms.

Smith was confident that although much of their work had to be redone, the fair would go on. And it did, but only with lots of help from leaders, members and the community.

Smith recognizes the importance of the fair, this year especially, because it gave people a break from difficult times.

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