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The News-Sentinel

Opinions on city's control effort mixed

**Officials say they're doing what they can to lessen impact.**

**By Cindy Larson**

**of The News-Sentinel**

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Larry Chambers worked for two days to keep water from his Belle Vista home, then gave up and went to a motel Wednesday on the advice of a Fort Wayne city engineer. Chambers, who grew up in Waynedale, said after the city put in new relief sewers a few years ago, he believed "it wasn't supposed to flood again."

Although flood-prevention efforts in the Belle Vista area seem to have failed, Chambers nevertheless praised the city's efforts to curb damage, especially the "blue-collar workers manning the pumps."

"Between the volunteers and the city, I think they've done a hell of a job," he said.

Not everyone was as complimentary of the city's efforts.

"I think we were forgotten here," said a resident of the flooded Woodhurst neighborhood who didn't want to be identified. "They're just thrilled about Headwaters Park - what are they doing about this?"

Plenty, if you ask city officials.

City employees have worked thousands of hours of overtime this week, said spokesman John Perlich. Field supervisors have monitored major flooding sites, where water is being held back by clay dikes and sandbags. Senior engineers have planned strategy at the city's Emergency Operation



News-Sentinel photo by [Eugene Harding](#)

### Pumps from Chicago

A huge diesel pump was set up on Thursday, July 10, in front of Kyle Hawkins' Allendale Court home to protect houses on the cul-de-sac threatened by the Fairfield Ditch. It was one of eight the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had brought in from Chicago.

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Center or assessed the situation in the field.

Every piece of equipment the city has is in service, Perlich said, and a massive corps of volunteers was assembled. Then the city coached volunteers on how to properly fill sandbags and build a dike.

## Focusing efforts

Hard-hit Woodhurst neighborhood near the southern end of Foster Park was *not* one of the city's success stories in this flood.

"My heart goes out to everybody in Woodhurst," Mayor Graham Richard said.

But Richard said city engineers concentrated on areas where flood-control efforts had a chance of working. And because of the volume of water pouring into the St. Marys, in some places nothing was going to stem the flood.

"The problem with the St. Marys is we didn't have a lot of experience with anything of this magnitude," Richard said. "Flood engineers were doing things to protect as many houses as possible."

The city didn't target areas to save, he said, but instead focused efforts on areas where it could do the most good.

"(You) choose where you've got a chance of stopping the flood," he said.

The city's senior engineers looked at elevations and accessibility in determining where to focus its flood-fighting efforts, said Bob Kennedy, assistant director of City Utilities and Public Works.

The city was able to save certain areas "because we had a way to get that accomplished," Richard said.

Richard cited as an example a clay dike on the St. Marys that successfully shielded Candlelite Apartments off Fairfield from the floodwaters. Yet just south, Fairfield Gardens apartments flooded.

Another area of attention was the Fairfield Ditch, which threatened to flood the Belle Vista neighborhood. Although water seeped into Chambers' house despite his best efforts, just a few blocks away, Kyle Hawkins' Allendale Court home stayed dry.

City workers set up a huge diesel pump about 3 a.m. Thursday in front of Hawkins' home to protect houses on the cul-de-sac threatened by the Fairfield Ditch. The pump was one of eight the Army Corps of Engineers had brought in from Chicago. The water wasn't cresting over the dike Thursday, but seemed to be seeping through it, draining into the street where the pump shot it through a pipe back into the ditch.

"They're doing a great job," Hawkins said of the city, although he did get upset at one point Wednesday when he said a city engineer "got lippy" with him.

If the city doesn't raise the dike in the near future, Hawkins is going to sell the house. "It's not worth it."

## An Army of help

Dave Foster headed up the \$50 million diking project along Fort Wayne's three rivers that was completed in 2001, and Thursday he was back in town assessing the situation and offering technical support.

Foster said flooding along the St. Marys is *not* a result of the diking project. "All we did was rehabilitate the existing system," he said. Building existing dikes higher did not cause any bottleneck effect.

But Woodhurst resident Mike Roffelsen wasn't as confident in the corps' expertise.

His home on Indiana Avenue sits just high enough he's not required to have flood insurance. "The Army Corps of Engineers said it wouldn't flood," he said. But a sandbag dike surrounding his home was the only thing keeping floodwater out Thursday.

Roffelsen and several friends hastily built the dike around his house Wednesday, then pumped out water inside the dike that was lapping at his front door. He's not happy with the city's efforts, saying they didn't do enough to forewarn residents and tell them what to do.

City spokesman Perlich disagreed, saying the city did all it could to keep the public updated on the flood situation, road closures and where to volunteer. The city also urged volunteers to go to the main sandbag staging areas so they could be trained on how to properly fill sandbags and build a dike.

Across the street from Roffelsen, Jim Heeren was running a pump trying to keep water from his house as it crept up from the crawl space.

"I thought (the city) handled it the best they could," he said. The city was bringing in sandbags every 15 minutes late Tuesday. "City trucks were here constantly."

And Heeren, whose house sits lower than Roffelsen's, is actually thankful he's in a flood plain: he has flood insurance.

## Cleanup efforts

As floodwaters slowly recede, city officials are beginning to plan the massive cleanup effort.

The city has two teams in place to organize recovery and cleanup efforts, Richard said. One team will assist flood victims with getting federal disaster aid; the other will assist neighborhoods and individuals in the cleanup, including the disposal of contaminated sand.

"I would love for the city to come out," said Roffelsen, looking at the long line of sandbags that encircle his home. But he's skeptical that's going to happen.

Perlich couldn't say how extensive the city's cleanup help will be because those plans are still being put together, but the city is asking for volunteers to aid in the effort. To volunteer for the cleanup, call 427-5858.

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