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## NEWS from the CWC

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### **CWC recovers from Irene, then helps 149 businesses do the same**

When the East Branch of the Delaware River and the Binnekill stream became one last August 28 and swallowed the valley that includes the Village of Margaretville, the Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC) office was among the buildings engulfed by the muddy torrent.

The stone structure at 905 Main Street, built in the 1960s as the home of the *Catskill Mountain News*, was strong enough to withstand the physical force of the flood, but water nonetheless seeped in under three doors, two of them four feet above the parking lot.

Diane Galusha, Communications Director for the CWC, watched the rising tide from the roof of the one-story structure which is built against a hillside that slopes from her own backyard. It was a scene she had witnessed in 1996, when she was Editor of the *News* and worked in the same building.

“I couldn’t believe I was seeing it again, trees, fuel tanks, hay bales sailing down the street, the river reaching the rafters of the pavilion in the park. With water lapping at the handle of the back door, I knew exactly what we’d find when we could finally get inside.”

Seventeen inches of water in the building had left carpeting, file cabinets, walls, and chair seats soaked. Miraculously the lights stayed on, but phones and computers were inoperable. CWC staff members who could safely make it to Margaretville spent three days mopping mud, tossing ruined items and moving file cabinets and furniture to get soggy carpeting off the floor.

Executive Director Alan Rosa choreographed the recovery by calling in a Pennsylvania firm to pick up and freeze dry important files, arranging for a 30-yard dumpster to be dropped off (it was filled three times), and engaging a contractor to remove the bottom four feet of sheetrock from perimeter walls.

Critical computer servers were temporarily moved to NBT Bank. Staff computers were placed in a conference room to dry out with the help of dehumidifiers, and then were taken to a staff member’s home, along with boxes of damp file folders for safe keeping.

Then it was time for a professional company to dry out the building and take over the clean up where the staff had left off. Eventually the contractor returned to rebuild walls, bathrooms and the kitchen.

Many of the 18-member staff worked from home for the first week. It was three weeks before the organization returned to full operation, handling inquiries about septic replacement, community wastewater issues, watershed education projects and economic development initiatives for which the CWC was created in 1997. It was another six weeks before the office was reconstructed.

But the wheels were already in motion to get desperately needed money into the hands of businesses that had suffered much worse damage than the CWC.

### **Help in a hurry**

Meeting in special telephone session September 13, the CWC Board of Directors had authorized the 2011 Flood Recovery Grant Program to help for-profit enterprises get back on their

feet, using \$5 million from the Catskill Fund for the Future (CFF), the CWC's economic development fund.

"We want to help stores, shops, salons, mills and other small businesses that are the heart of the Catskills' economy to get back in business as soon as possible," Director Rosa said in announcing the new program. "Functioning businesses will allow our communities to recover from this disaster, and will help us resume life as we know it and love it in this beautiful region."

As it happens, the program was the first to get money into the hands of Watershed businesses that had sustained physical damage. Within a week of passage of the program, checks were delivered to the devastated community of Prattsville, where more than 20 businesses had been ravaged.

The program has since that time provided funds to 149 businesses in 13 towns whose Supervisors, working in some cases with community development organizations, provided CWC with a list of businesses needing reconstruction help. Fifty-eight Middletown businesses were assisted, 17 in Shandaken, five more in the Town of Roxbury.

The grants have gone to pay for labor and materials to repair walls, floors, foundations, windows and fixed improvements. "We realize it will take much more to make many of these businesses whole, but the program certainly helped make critical initial repairs that allowed them to move forward," said CWC Economic Development Director Barbara Puglisi. "It also kept contractors and their employees working, and cash flowing to local suppliers."

The CWC has disbursed \$2.6 million to date, much of it leveraged with grants offered by other recovery programs in an effort to stretch the resources.

### **Stream Debris**

While it continued to address the immediate needs of the business community, the CWC Board moved to tackle the issue of flood debris choking streams and posing a threat to downstream properties in future floods.

The Stream Corridor Protection Debris Removal Program was launched in December. Municipalities and landowners facing daunting tangles of debris -- entire trees, parts of buildings, furniture, and other 'floatables' -- applied for grants to hire contractors to cut up, remove, burn or bury the materials.

As of August 1, 2012, forty-one projects had been completed, using more than \$507,000 in CWC funds. Fifty-three more projects are in the pipeline.

The CWC is a non-profit, Local Development Corporation responsible for several environmental protection, economic development and education programs in the five-county New York City Watershed West of the Hudson River.

For more information, go to [www.cwconline.org](http://www.cwconline.org), or call toll-free 877-928-7433; or 845-586-1400.