

FACES OF HOME

'My Safe Haven, My Castle'

The Souris River flood of 2011 inundated over 11,000 acres in Ward County, North Dakota, 4,115 homes flooded and more than 11,000 people were displaced, mostly within the community of Minot. The years following have been a challenging time for residents, and rebuilding and moving on has been particularly difficult for residents like Linda Spence whose physical disabilities require the use of a wheelchair.

Spence rented a home near the river that she was forced to vacate on June 1. That day, she had water over her wheels. Luckily a few National Guard members were nearby and were able to help Spence to safety. A second mandatory evacuation took place 21 days later. While Spence was able to get out safely again, this time flood waters rose to the roof of her home.

After the waters receded, the City of Minot deemed Spence's home uninhabitable. The flood had opened a basement wall and water flowed through her home destroying everything in it.

"I miss my kids' baby pictures, and the handmade gifts they had given me. Those are the things I miss the most," says Spence, when asked to reflect back on the disaster.

After the flood, accessible housing units were very hard to find in the community. Spence lived in hotels, a moving van, and at least 20 shelters before finally getting into a Federal



Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) temporary housing unit with a ramp.

Scott Burlingame, executive director of Independence Inc., a non-profit organization that offers advocacy and teaches living skills to help those like Spence live independently, found that the

flood really amplified the affordable and accessible housing shortage.

"There is an affordable housing shortage, period," said Burlingame.

"Then there is the issue of finding accessible housing on top of that. Many people with disabilities lost their homes during the flood. It's a first for them to go through the process of losing everything, and it's really challenging when they have additional housing obstacles to overcome."

Spence never stopped looking for affordable long-term housing to apply

for and her persistence finally paid off. In February, the Minot Housing Authority announced a lottery system would be conducted to determine which households would receive leases at Washington Townhomes, Minot's first new affordable housing development in a decade.

Spence was one of 32 households who were lucky enough to have their names drawn for a unit in the first phase of the development. She says her new home has provided the opportunity to rebuild her life.

"The disaster made me realize what was truly important," said Spence.

Beyond Shelter Inc. (BSI), a non-profit developer of affordable housing

Souris River Flood Recovery

As a part of the state's flood recovery efforts, the Industrial Commission of North Dakota approved a plan by NDHFA to make an advance commitment of up to \$650,000 of its 2012 low income housing tax credits to build or buy and rehabilitate rental units for lower-income households in flood-ravaged Minot.

financed Washington Townhomes through state, local, and federal programs including the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program administered by North Dakota Housing Finance

Agency. The credits brought equity to the project where rents range from \$398 to \$930 per month.

The new development is helping meet some of the affordable housing needs in the community as it recovers from the flood.

"I am so thankful for a home that is perfectly made for me," said Spence. "All the outlets and switches are where I can reach them. The doorways are wide. And, it's beautiful. Washington Townhomes is my safe haven, my castle."

(Original article published in Jan. 2014.)