

Low-income residents to rank top five issues with neighborhood

By LAMAUR STANCIL

FELLSMERE — A downpour of rain last month didn't stop more than 40 residents of a low-income Fellsmere neighborhood from huddling under a park pavilion to talk about community improvements.

But as city and county leaders learned that day, rainwater over the heads of the residents in the Carter Hall James subdivision isn't one of their concerns. It's the rainwater under their feet that's the problem.

Flooding has been one of the persistent concerns there. Though Pamela Jefferson lives on a road where significant drainage work was done a few years ago, she said she still experiences flooding in her yard.

The soggy April 21 meeting was the first in a series hosted by the Indian River County Health Department's Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence program. Rain or shine, program coordinator Julianne Price said she'll continue meeting with residents in the neighborhood on the third Saturday of each of the next several months to determine what their needs are.

"They need to express themselves so we can move forward with an action plan," Price said. "We'll take the top five issues they identify and we'll try to solve them."

The program goes to communities such as Carter Hall James to learn what problems residents need addressed. The predominately black community has more than 100 homes and many low-income residents.

Once the process is done, Price will work with city and county leaders on solutions. But some solutions are already available.

On the drainage issue, residents told Price they were concerned their swales weren't being cleaned out consistently and could cause flooding. Days later, the county's Public Works Department arrived to clean out the swales, which it had previously planned to do, she said.

Bus safety for schoolchildren and beautification efforts by the city were also problems identified by Carter Hall James residents.

If the response by local leaders is similar to when the PACE program visited Wabasso in 2004, Fellsmere residents could see some improvements in the next couple of years. Wabasso residents said they needed water service, streetlights and other services. County officials and benevolent groups put more than \$1 million worth of improvements into the community within a few years.

PACE MEETING

- The Indian River County Health Department's Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence program will have a meeting at 11 a.m. May 19 at Grant Park in the Carter Hall James subdivision in Fellsmere.
- For more information, call PACE coordinator Julianne Price at (772) 794-744 or Fellsmere Community Relations Director Bonnie Heck at (772) 571-9877.

SETTING THE PACE

Surveys to be given out at the May 19 meeting will have questions about residents' needs. Here's a sample of the likely questions.

- Do you feel your home is environmentally safe to live in?
- Are there abandoned buildings in your neighborhood you think should be demolished?
- How would you rate the police service in your community?
- Do you feel government officials are able to respond to your community's issues?

ALSO ON MAY 19

- The Fellsmere City Council will have a 10 a.m. community forum at City Hall to discuss the city's growth plans.
- For more information on that meeting, call City Hall at (772) 571-0116.