

Health Department to help with facelift

By Natasha Carter
Staff writer

FELLSMERE - Last week on a rainy Saturday morning, about 40 residents of the Hall Carter James community showed up to discuss the street conditions and other issues with city council members, Indian River Sheriff's Office law enforcement, and The Protocol for Assisting Community Excellence or P.A.C.E. program, which is run by the Indian River County Health Department.

The housing community located near downtown Fellsmere has been waiting on a drastic change from the city for years.

"The area has never been upscale," said Dorothy Thomas, Fellsmere resident.

The city has a large Hispanic population and Blacks in the city feel that they are the forgotten few.

A 2000, census study showed that roughly 260 Blacks live in Fellsmere.

About 2,790 are Hispanic out of the 3,813 population conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Among the topics discussed was lack of housing, sidewalks, guardrails, trash, and the speed limit not being enforced at the bus stop.

"There are things we can do for ourselves. We have gotten lazy," said Annie Mae Brown, resident.

Community leader Rev. Ned Childers is outraged by the city's lack of interest in the community.

"People are tired of living how they are living and the city not taking care of their community," he said.

Rev. Childers also sees work happening everywhere in the city except the Hall Carter James area.

"Other areas are being taken care of and they are working around us," he said.

Mr. Childers complained of poor streetlights, unpaved streets, and obsolete park equipment.

"The only time this area of town is mentioned is when they are in the process of taking someone's property," Mr. Childers said.

Julianne Price of the P.A.C.E. program said the health department will have monthly meetings until all issues are heard.

"We will be hearing about septic systems, crime, lack of affordable housing, and lots of abandoned issues," Mrs. Price said. "We want to form partnerships."

Most recently the P.A.C.E. program finished a water project in Wabasso. Some residents of that community had no water connections and many were receiving water from wells that was deemed unhealthy. Residents in the community also complained of lack of street lighting and sidewalks.

After successfully completing the task in Wabasso the program's focus is now on Fellsmere.

"All parties are ready to get involved. At the next meeting we will have community surveys," Mrs. Price said.

Community residents were happy to hear that the Indian River County Health Department is interested.

"At this meeting questions were answered. The main thing is knowing how to get the problem solved. People will now get together to go to council meetings and get results," said Jacqueline Lawernce, assistant at Bethel AME Church.

A once skeptical Rev. Childers said he feels the same.

"I believe we accomplished something. We see the city will help, but we have to help the city. It's a joint effort," he said.

"I look forward to see what the city will do now that we have voiced our opinions," Rev. Childers said.

The city has been having meetings with community members along with code enforcement, but this is the first meeting with the Health Department.

"It's time to start healing wounds. The community came with purpose and are willing to work," said Detective Teddy Floyd, Indian River Sheriff's Office.

Meetings in the Hall Carter James community are now scheduled monthly. The next meeting will take place at Grant Park on May 19 at 11 a.m.