

tcpalm March 8, 2007

Filmmaker documents improvements in West Wabasso

By HENRY A. STEPHENS

WEST WABASSO — Tammy Stinson and her children were just about to walk home Wednesday evening from West Wabasso Park when filmmaker Jim Cando spotted them playing — and put them all in a new documentary on meeting community health needs.

"We enjoy this park," said Stinson, 41, a lifelong community resident. "We come here all the time."

And she also enjoys living in an apartment with county water, she said, after having to cope for years with the light brown water from a well.

That's why Cando, owner of Take One Productions of Morrisville, N.C., was in town.

West Wabasso, an impoverished area north of County Road 510 and between 61st Drive and 66th Avenue, surprises many visitors with its stark contrast from the county's better-known communities.

"I was out (Tuesday) looking at the wells and the septic tanks," Cando said. "I've been in Haiti ... and it really resembles that with the lack of infrastructure. But when you look at the people's attitudes, they look like they have something to look forward to."

Cando was working Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday with a crew from the University of North Carolina. He videotaped some scenes of West Wabasso and the community improvements it has had in recent years, such as park equipment, streetlights and county water.

Producer Cora Harrison set up a studio at the county Health Department, interviewing the officials who had helped bring the improvements.

The university's School of Public Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention chose West Wabasso to showcase Florida's PACE program, or Protocol for Assisting Community Excellence, as part of the agencies' Public Health Grand Rounds series.

Contacted in her Atlanta office, CDC spokeswoman Rhonda Smith said her agency is interested in adopting the state program, in which residents tell government what they need instead of government officials deciding it for them.

"We're in the process of developing a new approach to the way we do things," she said.

County Environmental Health Specialist Julianne Price, who coordinates the program for the state, recalls meeting residents in 2004 and finding a community seemingly neglected by county officials and much resentment for the lack of services.

"I remember the community wanting pavilions in the park," Price said, adding the shelter would allow residents to beat the heat and hold picnics.

At one community meeting, she said, residents asked former County Commissioner Art Neuberger and County Administrator Joe Baird about getting pavilions.

"Art looks at Joe, 'Can we find money for the pavilions for the park?'" Price said. "Joe says, 'I believe we can,' and everyone applauded."



Jim Cando, left, the owner of Take One Productions, speaks with Julianne Price, the statewide coordinator for Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence, or PACE, on Wednesday afternoon. Cando was in the area filming for a documentary on the past and current water conditions in West Wabasso on Wednesday afternoon

Price said she also saw the lack of streetlights, paving and sidewalks and learned of the poor well water and called on county officials who could help. And she kept the attention until help arrived, such as an ongoing \$825,000 project switching residents from wells to new county waterlines.

Harrison said the documentary will be available starting May 11 at www.publichealthgrandrounds.unc.edu. She said the series is meant to help public health officials throughout the nation learn from each other by examining their success stories.

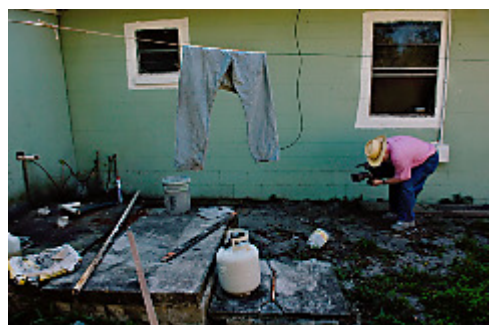
And West Wabasso was enough of a success story to catch the attention of state and federal officials, said Daniel Parker, the state's assistant environmental health director.

"The Indian River County Health Department has just done an excellent job with this project," he said. "It really has been astounding and leaves a sort of benchmark when other communities request (PACE funding) throughout the state."

Indian River County health officials list the following grants or volunteer services to West Wabasso since 2003 from public and private sources:

- Connecting homes to county water: \$825,000
- Pavilions for West Wabasso Park: \$81,750
- Walking trail and exercise equipment in the park: \$10,000
- Sidewalks: \$43,500
- Streetlights: \$7,281
- Improving faulty septic tanks: \$40,000
- World Changers' 26 new-roof projects: estimated \$40,000
- Demolition of abandoned homes: \$26,000
- Building of Margaret 'Big Momma' Brown's house: \$130,000
- Project Hope's presents, dinners and cleanup efforts: \$3,500

Julianne Price, coordinator for state's Protocol for Assisting Community Excellence



Jim Cando, the owner of Take One Productions from Raleigh, N.C., films an old homemade septic tank behind the home of Ellis Poindexter on Wednesday afternoon. Cando was in the area Wednesday filming for a documentary on the past and present water conditions in West Wabasso