

# Gifford woman gives blessing to having her house torn down

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GIFFORD — White lace curtain valances topping mauve mini blinds ballooned briefly in the breeze that came through broken out window frames and ragged blue tarps covered portions of the roof that hadn't yet caved in on the rooms below.

Lush landscaping enveloped the structure in a seemingly protective embrace.

Clara Swanigan raised seven children in this house at 4526 36th Ave. that she purchased in 1972 for \$9,000. But the hurricane-ravaged home has been vacant and vandalized and was demolished Saturday with Swanigan's blessing despite the many years of memories spent living there. Swanigan now lives elsewhere in Gifford.

The Gifford neighborhood home was dismantled thanks to a program coordinated by Julianne Price, an specialist with the Indian River County Environmental Health Division. Price coordinates the state's Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health. PACE works with homeowners who cannot afford to renovate or demolish homes that have become unlivable and a safety and health hazard to neighborhoods.

Contractors Collis Ward and Doug Stribling volunteered the demolition for the Swanigan home and the county commissioners allocated landfill fees to accommodate demolition debris from PACE projects. A trash container was donated by Treasure Coast Refuse for the Swanigan home demolition.

"The program has allowed the community to bring about solutions for abandoned homes in a manner that is thinking outside the box because it steps out of the lengthy (code) enforcement process and finds another way that involves the community," Price said.

Swanigan's home had become a haven for illicit activity that disturbed the homeowner and neighbors. Swanigan contacted PACE and law enforcement officials for help after reading about the program.

"This was a great program for me and I'm very appreciative of them doing it for me. Everything going on with the house started getting scary and now it makes the neighborhood safer," Swanigan said.

Next door neighbor Willie Staley favors the plan.

"I think it's a good idea to clean up the neighborhood. It's a worthwhile project," Staley said.

Sheriff's Deputy Teddy Floyd is a well-known Gifford community presence through the department's Community Oriented Policing Enforcement and works with Price to implement the PACE program in Gifford.

"We build partnerships and this is for the benefit of the community," Floyd said.

Swanigan's home is the fourth demolished in the Gifford neighborhood under the PACE program. The house became unlivable five years ago following two hurricanes. Swanigan, a bus driver for the county school district, said her homeowners insurance was insufficient to make necessary repairs and that year she was also caring for a son with cancer who subsequently died.