

Dilapidated house turned to dust

The house in the Carter Hall James subdivision of Fellsmere was demolished as part of a neighborhood clean-up effort

By Lamaur Stancil

FELLSMERE — By flattening a home in half an hour Wednesday morning, a Sebastian company and Indian River County leaders took a three-year burden off the shoulders of Willie Lewis.

Lewis had owned the home on 100th Place just on the outskirts of Fellsmere city limits in the Carter Hall James subdivision. He was renting it out in 2004 when the hurricanes struck. He was never able to get the money either to repair it or tear it down.

The home was unlivable, but that didn't stop local ne'er-do-wells from finding their uses for it. County officials at the site found needles and condoms lying around the property, and the construction crew found a homeless man inside the home before it was leveled.

"The house is right across from the preschool," said Lewis, who is on disability. "That's why I really wanted it torn down. I could go out there and run them off, but I couldn't stay there all night."



Photo by Sam Wolfe

Julianne Price, of the Indian River County Health Department, takes photos inside an abandoned house on 100th Place in Fellsmere on Wednesday morning. The dilapidated home was torn down in a matter of minutes by a crew from Henry Fischer and Sons Inc. of Sebastian.

The decision to level the house is part of a clean-up effort in the neighborhood by city and Indian River County leaders. Many of the 219 neighborhood residents want better conditions, but they have few means to keep their own homes in repair. That's why city and county leaders have torn down some homes as part of the improvement effort.

Sheriff's Deputy Teddy Floyd was concerned about the house and other abandoned buildings becoming safe havens for criminals in the neighborhood. That's why officials with the county Health Department's Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence program coordinated with Henry Fischer and Sons of Sebastian to demolish the house and a trailer on the site. Fischer provided the manpower at no cost, and the County Commission waived the disposal fees. The demolition and the disposal would have cost more than \$12,000, but it cost local drug dealers a hideout.

"Anytime you can wipe out a crack house, it's a good day," said Floyd while observing a track hoe pounding down the roof and walls of the home. "It's crime through environmental design. On a street like this, the criminals could go in this house and hide and a deputy may not know where to look for them."

The work crew lost track of the unidentified man who was inside the home Wednesday.

But the homes on 100th Place aren't the only demolition in Carter Hall James as of late. City officials had a concrete shell torn down a few months ago on Vernon Street. It was a home that had been under construction, but no work had been done on it in years.

And two deteriorating homes on State Street were torn down last summer, but will be replaced with two new ones on Nov. 10. Two Vero Beach companies — Regatta Construction and Holmes Homes Construction — are partnering to build the homes in one day for the two families. The work is being coordinated by the PACE program, with the construction companies and several subcontractors donating their services. While the Fischer crew leveled the 100th Place home, dirt was being filled for the homes on State Street a few blocks away by another volunteer contractor.

"It's neighbors helping neighbors," said Mike Pelletier of Mike's Landclearing and Excavation of Fellsmere, who was working on State Street. "I've known a lot of the people in this neighborhood for years."