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Hopes raised for a flood-prone house

By CATHERINE BAUM
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NORTHAMPTON - Looking at her home on stilts eight feet above the ground Friday, Mary Glazewski recalled two consecutive nights without sleep in her 20s. The first was an enjoyable last night on the town in Las Vegas. The second was a night of moving family belongings upstairs to avoid damage from rising waters.

"I called my parents to remind them to pick me up at the airport and they said 'the house is surrounded with water,'" Glazewski said, pointing to a three-foot-high water stain on her pine wood deck, which itself was eight feet high above the ground.

Route 5 was closed when she returned home from her western trip in the early 1980s. Her father, wearing rain boots, gave her a piggy-back ride to their flooded home. The family had plenty of work to do, but so did the Fire Department, which called for evacuation.

Holly, the "well-trained" family dog, had to go to the bathroom, but seemed confused when she realized there was no dry spot to lift a leg, she said. Glazewski, her parents and her dog got in a boat and rowed toward what is now the Clarion Hotel.

"We were on the front page of The (Boston) Globe that year," she said.

Sitting as it does about 240 feet from the Oxbow of the Connecticut River, at the corner of Island Road and Route 5, the home at 503 Mount Tom Road has been repeatedly flooded for years and is now being raised up, out of reach, its owners hope, of the Oxbow water table.

After four years of communications with the Conservation Commission, Federal Emergency Management Agency and Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, "it is exciting to see it finally go up," Glazewski said.

She noted the agencies vow to pay for 75 percent of the project, but declined to release a figure, saying it keeps changing.

"It is a moving target," she said.

Glazewski and her mother, Helen Glazewski, own the home. Helen Glazewski is the only one who lives there now. She is staying at another daughter's home in Northampton while the project is under way, according to Mary Glazewski, who lives in Chicopee.

The work began April 10, when Payne Building Movers Inc. of New Hampshire lifted the house. Raymond Gray, co-owner of Harris & Gray, and his employees excavated eight feet into the ground



GORDON DANIELS

Helen Glazewski and her daughter, Mary, at right, view their flood-prone house at 503 Mount Tom Road (Route 5) in Northampton, which now sits atop temporary pillars. The structure is being raised 7 feet to get it out of the way of spring floodwaters.



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Monday to lift the home's foundation. Less than half of the existing foundation is being rebuilt because it is too dated for new construction, he said.

The foundation will hold a garage and staircase to the house. The home will be lowered 12 inches and attached to the new first floor after its built. Helen and Ted Glazewski bought the home when it was a variety store more than 60 years ago.

From 1948 to the late 1960s, the Glazewski family ran the Oxbow Marina Variety Store, a seasonal boating business, gas station and general store. The operation closed when Interstate Route 91 was built because the highway cost the business its access to the river.

A new first floor will be built underneath the home "in order to get living space out of the water table," and prevent flooding, Gray said, removing foundation blocks with a bulldozer Thursday morning.

He met with the project's engineer, David Vreeland of Leyden-based Vreeland Design Associates Thursday and Friday. The project is expected to take three months, according to Gray.

Gray did not see any decay from flood damage, but said there was "a lot of water stains." Water stains are three feet tall - exceeding the length of the kitchen counters, he said. Flooding has previously caused Route 5 to close in that area.

"I've seen kayakers on Route 5," Gray said.

The two-story white house with black shutters is partially gated, with a bike, planters and chair swing among other things in the backyard. Yellow forsythia, a white shed and lawn ornaments are on the front and side yard. The stilts make the home stand out, Glazewski said, but she's used to people knowing her home.

"It's a house that everybody seems to know," she said. "It's always been a landmark."

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