

*Living Day to Day

(Continued from page 1.) which sits behind the home owned by her mother, Williams, is among the closest to Tchula Lake. The home, once a small but tidy space decorated with country-style furniture and sheer floral curtains, was inundated with several feet of water. The storm water knocked over a table, pulled books, binders and a box of corn flakes off of shelves, opened cabinets and strewn papers and trash across the floor. It left behind a thick coat of earth-colored dust and an overpowering moldy odor. Down the hall, thick, fuzzy black and white spores engulf the bottom half of each wall in a small bedroom. The home and most everything in it is unsalvageable. Horton plans to live with her mother until she can find a new home.

“After you see the water constantly rising, you know this is it,” Horton said. “The first time I lost everything was through divorce; this time, it was the water. That’s depressing.”

Some residents have received state assistance in temporarily relocating during the height of the flood. Groups like the American Red Cross have delivered bottled water and churches have collected food, clothing, cleaning supplies and toiletries.

“Everybody’s been bringing truckloads of water. You can get water for \$2 at Dollar General. These people need home repair,” Head said.

The meager attention Tchula has received — including, according to residents, from city leaders — prompted the national Poor People’s Campaign, led by longtime civil rights activist William Barber, to visit the town in May. Hundreds attended a rally at Good Samaritan Ecumenical

church Thursday to share the stories of those impacted. “I really think it’s (the city’s) job to see to the citizens that we’re protected by the water and stuff,” said resident Jacqueline Fisher, whose street was flooded and whose tap water still has a foul odor. “But they really didn’t. No kind of assistance at all. We still received (water, utility) bills even though we were back there in the flood. I don’t think that was right. I think they could have helped us a little better than they did.”

Reached by phone, Tchula Alderman Leroy Buchanan said, “I’m not going to give an interview about folks who are living in the flood zone who know that already.”

“The houses that everybody’s putting on the news,” Buchanan said, are in a flood zone established over a decade ago. “Most of them got FEMA relief in 2005. Most people chose to stay there ... What’s the big story about? People are crying and saying we’re not doing anything, because of what? ... Who am I to say what happens now? You want to interview me for what? ... It’s a flood zone. They live in a flood zone. If I filled your house with water every time it rained, what would you do?”

Buchanan said he didn’t know whether the folks whose homes flooded had the resources to relocate.

“I get up and go to work every day to provide for my family. Board of Alderman is not my job,” he said. “I can’t tell nobody else what to do.”

Tchula is just one part of the Mississippi Delta touched by interconnected flooding, the result of historically high levels in the Mississippi River and overflow in its tributary, the Yazoo River, which runs through Tchula Lake.

Of the 20 Mississippi

counties designated disaster zones following the recent storms, tornadoes and flooding, 16 are majority-white. “To be honest about it, I think even that’s political. It’s just depending on who you are and where you are,” Head said about who gets disaster aid.

The state’s official count of impacted homes in Holmes County

— one the poorest and least healthy counties in the state

— is two, a clear misrepresentation, although assessments are ongoing. The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) has not received a complete damage assessment from the county, a spokesperson explained to Mississippi Today, which the state needs before it can contact the Federal Emergency Management Agency to conduct a joint damage assessment. Holmes County Emergency Management Coordinator Gyrone Granderson did not return several calls from Mississippi Today.

Head said even Holmes County’s initial assessment seemed out-of-touch. “I think those numbers were very, very deceptive. I’ve heard 31, 21, but you can literally just go down and count,” Head said. “It’s really more people that have been impacted.”

Harriett Carter has lived in her beige shotgun house with sage green trim decked with large, colorful Christmas bulbs for over 35 years. Thin plastic sheets cover the windows. The yard is scattered with wooden pallets, which served as a makeshift bridge when the floodwaters rose right up to her front door.

Inside, the dampened floors slope from her dark living room, lit only by a blue fluorescent tube connected to a small aquarium, through her bedroom, to a small, mostly empty back room where the water pooled and left mold on the dark raw wood floors. Carter said an examiner — she didn’t know from where — told her he could smell the mold, but no one’s been back to discuss plans to deal with it.

“They didn’t say anything about getting no work done,” Carter said.

The recent damage from heavy storms only exacerbates the existing reasons why Carter’s house — with its low, plywood ceilings and walls covered in warped siding — is becoming unlivable.

“It’s not getting any better,” Carter said. The water, which sat under her house for weeks, has weakened its cement foundation.

Carter said she received \$800 last month from MEMA to aid with her temporary location — she stayed with her daughter most nights until the water receded — but the

money didn’t go far in repairing the damage.

“I just need help getting my house fixed,” she said.

Following the area’s last big flood, in the early 1980s, FEMA declared the area a disaster zone and helped Carter replace the floors and walls in her house and provided funds for clothes and supplies. “It didn’t take long,” Carter said.

For those most impacted, problems extend far beyond the weather; needed solutions go far beyond temporary disaster relief. “These officials and things, they need to get themselves together,” said Coats. “I’m just fed up with everything here in Tchula. It don’t seem like they want nothing here in Tchula.”

With dwindling employment, most residents have few realistic ways to stay in Tchula and achieve financial security or build wealth.

Less than 40 percent of Tchula’s adults participate in the labor force, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, and of those trying

to work, the unemployment rate is 23 percent, almost five times the state’s. Jobs are limited.

Some of the best albeit grueling work is at the area’s farms, maintaining large irrigation systems and repairing machines, often for out-of-state farm owners.

Lately, farmhand Quinton Harris said folks have been stealing the electrical cable that feeds power to the center-pivots, which spray water on the fields, and his job has been to replace it. He said he makes good money, but he can’t work when the land is flooded.

“It’s not good money when you’re without work,” Harris said. “Next week, I might not get nothing but two or three days ... I try to hold on to the little money I got.”

Mississippi Works, the state-funded job search engine that boasts more than 40,000 job openings across the state, lists nine jobs within 10 miles of Tchula. Six are for positions at Dollar General, most of which don’t pay a living wage, and the

remaining three are in agriculture.

“Opportunity doesn’t exist,” Head said. “And people just basically live from day to day. Not just Tchula, it’s Holmes County in general. It’s a struggle to survive because of the inopportunity.”

Head leads a local farming cooperative made up of more than a dozen black farmers just south of Tchula in the Mileston community. The co-op runs a youth program to teach local high school kids how to grow, harvest and prepare fresh vegetables. Head is also working to get the co-op’s produce sold to larger retailers across the state, which he sees as a launch pad for Tchula’s recovery.

“I’ve always said that until we create our opportunity ourselves by pooling our resources — you know, no one’s going to build a factory here,” Head said. “I just don’t believe people want to live in the conditions they’re living. I believe if they had opportunity, they’d do better.”



Jennie Jefferson didn’t get a chance to file an insurance claim on her wrecked white SUV, parked in her backyard, before the water came in and covered its hood. She doesn’t think her plan will pay out now, so she’s eating the \$2,000 she still owes on the vehicle, which was her only source of transportation, through \$250 monthly payments. Jefferson just moved into her new brick house, which she bought through a low-income program and is built high enough off the ground to have avoided flooding inside, last year. The water also filled her outdoor HVAC system, a several thousand-dollar unit that’s supposed to keep her home cool in the coming Mississippi summer heat. “I’m scared it might eventually go out,” Jefferson said.

(Photo by Eric Shelton/Mississippi Today)



Elizabeth Coats examines the conditions of her Tchula home May 9, 2019 following recent flooding. Clothing, purses, linens, newspapers, notebooks, toiletries, electronics and picture frames overwhelm every surface in her trailer, including a brown striped sectional. While recent floodwaters did not enter the inside of Coats’ dilapidated home, it looks like they could have.

(Photo by Eric Shelton/Mississippi Today)

Holmes County Central High School Summer Feeding Program

Holmes County Central High School, 9479 Brozville Road, Lexington, MS 39095 will hold its Summer Feeding Program beginning June 3, 2019 and ending July 31, 2019. Breakfast will be served from 7:30 a.m. until 8:30 and lunch will be served from 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. All meals are free to all children age 18 years and younger. There is no fee/registration in accordance with Federal Law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability. USDA is an equal opportunity employer. For more information, you may contact Mr. Willie West at (662) 299-1288.

EXPRESS GRAIN COMMODITY PRICES

Crop	CBOT Month	Delivery Period	Futures Price	EGT Basis	Net Change
Wheat	Jul 19	2019 Jun	4.78	-0.22	4.56 0.13
Corn	Jul 19	2019 May	3.89	0.04	3.93 0.06
Corn	Sep 19	2019 Aug	3.97	-0.07	3.90 0.06
Soybeans Sidon	Nov 19	2019 Aug-Sep	8.58	-0.48	8.10 0.11
Soybeans G'wood	Jul 19	2019 May - Deferred Pricing only	8.32	-0.46	7.86 0.10
Soybeans G'wood	Nov 19	2019 Aug-Sep	8.58	-0.32	8.26 0.11
Soybeans G'wood	Jan 20	2020 Jan	8.70	-0.24	8.46 0.10
Soybeans Minter City	Nov 19	2019 Aug-Sep	8.58	-0.38	8.20 0.11
Rice	May 19		11.225		0.320
Rice	Sep 19		11.330		0.225
Cotton	Jul 19		67.58		-0.120
Cotton	Dec 19		67.65		0.560

Prices as of 2:00 p.m. on 5/20/19

Call to get daily bids by cell phone or email
www.ExpressGrain.com 662-453-0800