

# *Flood Mitigation Partnership laser focused on long term flooding solution*

By **SHELLEY LEE**  
**NOW Staff Writer**

Flooding has been an all too common and unpleasant subject to say the least. While the community has come together in force to help in the recurring recovery, many are still struggling. With four significant flood events in under eight months people want a solution.

Tony Iriti is one of those people. He started working on it after the first recent major flood in January of 2007. Mayor of Findlay at the time, Iriti went to Washington D.C. with a letter for the Army Corp of Engineers asking them to do a study of the area. He made a case for the federal legislature, the only body who can authorize and fund this process.

Long story short, the timing was good and there were some funds that they were able to reallocate to get started, \$89,000 worth. One man from the Army Corp told Iriti it helped that one of his superiors saw Iriti on CNN during the flood.

After the August flood, Gary Heminger, President of Marathon Petroleum Co., convened a meeting with local business leaders. He expressed the need for the private sector to get involved in the recovery and the long term solution. Marathon made a substantial donation to get that started.

He challenged other members of the community to do the same. Some offered no-interest loans among other things, to help the community get back on its feet.

Heminger also asked local business leaders to engage in helping the local government develop a flood mitigation plan and then ultimately, to help expedite that process as much as possible.

A meeting put together by Congressman Jim Jordan was a pivotal event, one Iriti calls historic. The host of influential people Iriti joined in one room included Congressman Jim Jordan, Representative Marcy Kaptur, Senator Brown, then Senator Voinovich, representatives from the Governor's office, the Army Corp of Engineers, Homeland Security, FEMA, Marathon Corporation, Cooper Tire, and First Federal Bank. Each of them pledged to help get through the red tape so that a flood mitigation plan could be accomplished.

Iriti's term was up at the end of that year, but he continued to serve the flood mitigation project. In January of 2008 the non-profit, privately funded, Northwest Ohio Flood Mitigation Partnership was born. Their mission: to expedite the design and development of a long-range flood mitigation plan to help alleviate flooding throughout the Blanchard River Watershed.

Fortuitously, the Army Corp of Engineers met with them, just two days after the February 6, 2008 flood to get the process started. Soon after, a cost sharing agreement for the feasibility study was signed by Findlay's new mayor, Pete Sehnert.

But this is a process with a timeline. Fixing flooding is not as quick as some might imagine.

Some people have asked, why not just build a big retention pond east of Findlay? The answer: An effective retention pond would have to cover an entire square mile and be more than 60 feet deep.

During the August flood approximately 82 billion gallons of water passed through Findlay. That's more than 10 times what the reservoir holds.

Others have questioned, why don't we just dredge the river out two feet and reduce the flood level by two feet? Answer: Dredging the river two feet will not reduce the flood stage by two feet. The added capacity gained by dredging two feet of the river bottom at its normal width of 150 feet is insignificant compared to the quantity of water in the river when it is at flood stage, one half to one mile wide in spots. Dredging is also a temporary solution. Sediment removed ultimately will redevelop in a relatively short time.

Still others believe development is the cause of flooding. Yet, despite the development, the amount of rainfall it takes to cause a flood has not changed in 50 years. In February 1959, 3.14 inches of rain fell and the river rose to 16.76 feet. In February 2008, 3.38 inches of rain fell and the river rose to 16.50 feet. Only 6% of the watershed is urban, not all developed, and 94.1% of the rain falls on cropland, finding its way to the Blanchard River and its tributaries.

The problem is one that affects the entire Blanchard River Watershed area, so it makes sense that the solution lies in effectively channeling the watershed.

The timeline for completing the scope of work, feasibility study, and then developing the plans and specifications that are recommended spans four years.

It is an incredibly big project and everything must follow the National Environmental Policy Act.

There is also productive farmland to think about. With agriculture being the area's largest industry it is important that the entire process considers that as well.

The flood mitigation partnership intends to shave off as much off the timeline as they can. Already they have expedited the process by two months.

Represented on the Partnership board are: Cooper Tire & Rubber Co., Marathon Oil Corp., Blanchard Valley Health System, Fifth Third Bank, P & G Pet Care (maker of Iams and Eukanuba), National Lime & Stone Co., Pro-Tec Coating Co., W.C. Wood Corp, Inc., Whirlpool Corp., and The Findlay-Hancock County Community Foundation .

The City of Findlay, Village of Ottawa, and Hancock and Putnam Counties have signed resolutions endorsing the Partnership. Allen and Hardin County, as well as the Village of Bluffton also are expected to sign a similar resolution.

Additional assistance and expertise will be provided by consultants, local government, The Blanchard River Watershed Partnership, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and state and federal legislators.

For more information on the Northwest Ohio Flood Mitigation Partnership visit [www.floodpartnership.org](http://www.floodpartnership.org).