

Georgist Volunteer Helps Flood Victims

David Domke

"They say the economy is booming and employment is high - they say these are good times," says Evelyn Samuels, "but don't tell that to the residents of Princeville, North Carolina. Their town of 1,200 homes was virtually destroyed during the devastating floods following hurricane Floyd last year and they are now displaced persons living in government-issue summer trailers."

In fact, their town is now called Princeville/FEMA Park (FEMA is the Federal Emergency Management Agency) and, as Evelyn relates it, it is a "psuedo-town" with no services, no schools, no health care, no jobs, and nowhere to buy goods." This trailer park, inexplicably situated behind a women's maximum security prison, is itself only temporary - the U.S. Government says they must vacate even those meagre dwellings after 18 months. And even "FEMA-ville" as the residents themselves call it is not a gift of government charity or a service rendered for taxes the citizens have paid over the

past years. The residents are actually charged rent by the government for the "privilege" to live there. And they can never return to their

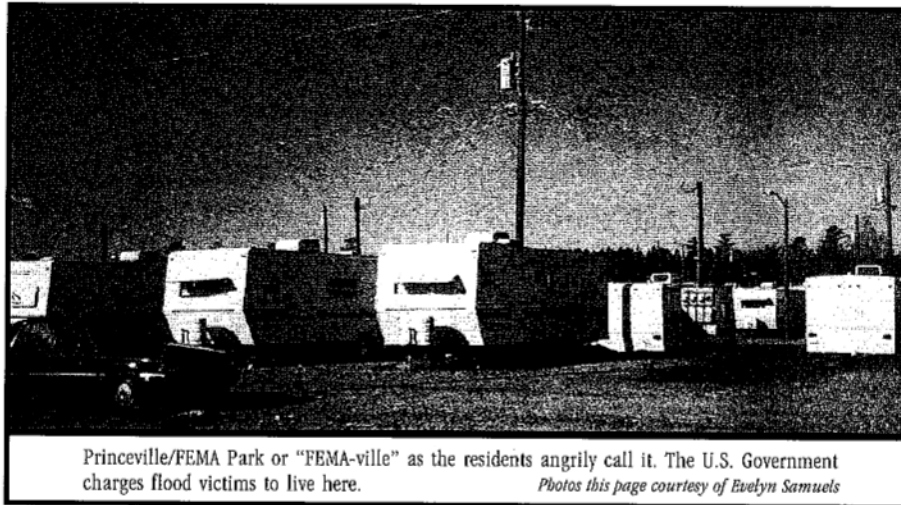
former town for the government has condemned the entire place as unsafe to live in.

Evelyn, a long-time volunteer at the Henry George School, has seen first hand the dire circumstances these people now live in. Over last Christmas she

joined a group of people who travelled to Princeville to see what could be done to help the families there.

"There are a number of people there with no socks, no winter coats and many children with only T-shirts to wear - they lost so much during the floods. These people are poor - they're truly helpless *and* they can't return to their homes; after a few months they will have no place to go."

Ironically, Princeville was once called *Freedom Hill*. It was established by freed Black slaves in 1865 and in 1885, it was incorporated as the town of Princeville, making it the first all Black town in the nation. Today that rich heritage is all but a memory as the descendents of the town's founders struggle to survive in the shadow of a



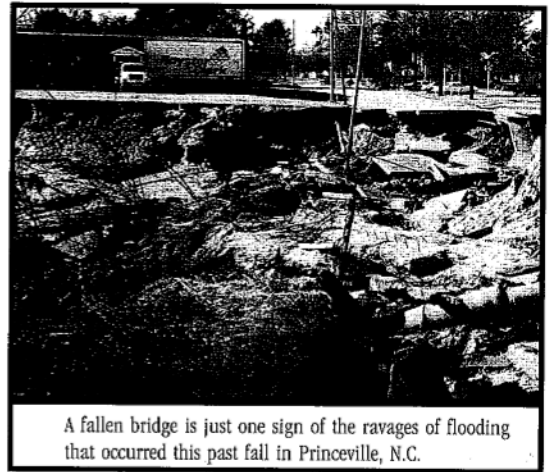
Princeville/FEMA Park or "FEMA-ville" as the residents angrily call it. The U.S. Government charges flood victims to live here.
Photos this page courtesy of Evelyn Samuels

maximum security prison and now live in what amounts to a shantytown-on-wheels.

Since Princeville is not situated in a flood plain, the town's residents were not eligible for flood insurance. Flood plain or not, the waters from the nearby Tar River crested at 43 feet, rising to the top of the 19th century church steeples and centuries old pine trees. Many people had to be rescued from their house tops and in some cases tree tops by helicopter as the waters rose.

Adding to the resident's frustration, a number of land speculators have descended on the town, pressuring them to sell their land.

The townspeople have decided to rebuild, spurning both the offers of speculators and government buyouts. The cost of rebuilding is



A fallen bridge is just one sign of the ravages of flooding that occurred this past fall in Princeville, N.C.

estimated to be \$80 million. Some of the expense is being offset by volunteer labor provided by neighboring churches and college students.

The Congressional Black Caucus is pushing for federal relief initiatives for the entire region. Hopefully, this will stimulate banks to offer the low interest financing needed to undertake the massive rebuilding project.

As a sign of the community's spirit, one local resident was quoted as saying "We don't have anything left in regard to material things, but we have each other, our spirit and our faith. Our ancestors started

with nothing and they made it. We can too."

Commenting on that can-do community spirit, Evelyn says that in talking to many of the local residents, what comes through is a strong sense that "this is their home, no matter what. They own the land and place their hopes for the future on that fact. They may not have much now, after the flood - but they have the land." Evelyn plans to go back soon. "The need is just so great, she says."

Donations can be made to the Princeville Rebuilding Fund c/o Centura Bank, PO Box 560, Tarboro, NC 27886. To provide building supplies and labor: The Congressional Black Caucus Hurricane Floyd Relief Fund, 800-784-2577.



Evelyn Samuels points to the still-standing sign of the former town of Princeville.