

THE FLOOD OF '97



In the top two photos, MSD workers install the last of the plates of the Sixth Street closure March 3, 1997; the sandbags in the foreground will be used to reinforce the place where the closure meets the street. The bottom photo, taken from the Belvedere at the crest of the flood March 6, shows the closure holding back the flood.

The Flood of '97 seems almost an afterthought now, especially to those who weren't directly affected. But to those who had to evacuate their homes and neighborhoods, or who had to rebuild homes and lives, the Flood of '97 is still a vivid memory. Life in a river city always presents the threat of flooding, but after 33 years without a major flood, a sense of shock accompanied the flood that came fast and hard in March 1997.

Over 12 inches of rain fell on Louisville, Jefferson County and much of the Ohio River Basin from Friday, February 28 until Sunday, March 2, 1997. The result for the Louisville Metropolitan Area was the sixth worst Ohio River flood on record and inland flash flooding, which forced more than 4,000 families from their homes and caused one fatality. An estimated 50,000 structures in Louisville and Jefferson County were damaged by surface flooding or back-ups from overloaded sewer lines. On Tuesday, March 4, the Ohio River was rising at an incredible rate of more than one foot per hour. The river was flowing at a rate of 747,000 cubic feet per second, carrying houses, propane tanks and tons of other debris downstream. In all, Louisville and Jefferson County suffered more than \$85 million in public and private property losses.

During the 10-day event, MSD employees were called upon to provide 24-hour service in assisting other local emergency service agencies. More than 150 MSD maintenance employees worked around the clock to install 26 floodwall closures and operate 15 flood pumping stations. The 27-mile long flood protection system protects more than 100 square miles of the city and county that lie in the



TOP: Most of Louisville's riverfront outside the floodwall was flooded March 6.

BOTTOM: On March 3, workers assemble the framework of the floodwall closure at Seventh Street.



As record rains fell March 1, many residential streets and yards were flooded — including Sutherland Drive near the South Fork of Beargrass Creek (right), and Blue Lick Road near Fishpool Creek (below).



floodplain of the Ohio River. The flood protection system worked flawlessly and the city remained dry.

In southern Jefferson County, where much of the flash flooding occurred in the Pond Creek Watershed, MSD engineers and technicians assisted the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in documenting flood levels, flood limits and property damage reports. MSD developed volumes of information that were used to apply for federal flood relief funds. Although no federal funding was allocated for Jefferson County, the information is now being used to develop new flood protection projects that will minimize the effects of future floods.



Throughout the crisis, LOJIC, the MSD managed computer mapping and geographic information system, was used to churn out maps showing flood limits and projected flooding areas. Emergency forces, such as police, fire departments and the National Guard, used these maps to identify evacuation zones. The maps were also used to keep the entire community informed about the flood.

Many other MSD employees volunteered their time by filling sandbags and providing relief to front-line forces. Fighting the Flood of '97 was truly a team effort among MSD, local government emergency agencies and the citizens of the community. It is hoped that, the lessons learned from the event will make us even better prepared for the next flood.



ABOVE: By March 12, floodwaters had receded, and MSD workers help wash the mud from the downtown wharf.

RIGHT: Southern Ditch was full to the top of its banks near Minor Lane on March 1; many nearby streets were flooded.

