

Hurricane-ravaged home finally demolished

- By [Janet Begley](#)
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PHOTO BY SAM WOLFE, SAM WOLFE

SAM WOLFE/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS Tim Ryan, of Heavy Equipment Services Inc. in Vero Beach, runs a front-end loader while demolishing the former home of Ernestine Roker in Gifford on Wednesday morning. The home sustained damage during hurricanes in 2004 and was partially destroyed by fire two years ago.



PHOTO BY SAM WOLFE, SAM WOLFE

SAM WOLFE/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS Jahkari Carter, 3, waves to his great-aunt Audrey Williams as deputy Teddy Floyd, of the Indian River County Sheriff's Office, carries him around as the former home of Ernestine Roker is torn down on Wednesday morning. Williams was raised by Roker, her grandmother, and is raising her great-nephew in her home across the street from the demolished home.

Gifford Home Demolition



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GIFFORD — It took about 20 trailer-loads full of debris, but two abandoned houses on 46th Place in Gifford are gone.

Houses at 3985 and 3991 46th Place were torn down Wednesday morning through the state's Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence (PACE) program, which is coordinated by Julianne Price, a specialist with the Indian River County Environmental Health Division.

Price also is president of Every Dream Has a Price, a nonprofit organization that works to restore, rebuild or even build affordable housing for low-income residents.

"This is the solution that the community came up with," said Price. "One of the things that the community wanted us to do was to get rid of these abandoned houses. We've probably done at least 20 of them in the past two years."

Sheriff's Deputy Teddy Floyd, who partners with Price in her nonprofit organization, said both houses sustained substantial structural damage in the hurricanes of 2004-05.

"The owners tried to get help," said Floyd. "But the houses just couldn't be fixed."

Demolition at 3985 46th Place was quick because the home also had been partially destroyed in a fire set by vandals. The owner, Ernestine Roker, died two years ago, and her granddaughter, Audrey Williams, was at the house Wednesday to watch the demolition.

"I feel just terrible," said Williams. "I really wanted to get the house repaired for my grandmother. I was raised here and my grandmother always wanted us to fix her house. What a day."

The house at 3991 46th Place took longer to demolish because a power line from the house to the utility pole had to be disconnected by Florida Power & Light Co. The house has sat in disrepair for years, and owner Mary Alice Williams recently discovered she was being fined \$100 a day for code enforcement violations.

Permit costs for the demolition were covered by Parent Construction Inc. of Vero Beach, while Heavy Equipment Services Inc. of Vero Beach provided the manpower and equipment at no charge. Contractor Joe Massagee estimated the cost to demolish each home was \$7,000. The county allocated the funds to cover the disposal fees at the landfill, Price said.

Freddie Woolfork, who is chairman of the Gifford Front Porch Council, said the demolition is an "inspiration" to Gifford residents.

"For many years, the perception within the Gifford community was that they were overlooked," Woolfork said. "But with the establishment of such strong community partnerships like we have here today, we're moving forward."

Albert Thomas grew up on 46th Place and watched the demolition from the street on Wednesday morning.

"It was sad, but it's going to help with the appearance of the neighborhood," Thomas said. "It's certainly going to make it look better. It just needed to happen."