

Flood-ravaged family at home in Forest City

By RAE YOST, For The Globe Gazette | Posted: Thursday, November 4, 2010 1:08 am

FOREST CITY — Bob O'Dell knew what the dedication of his family's new house last week in Forest City meant.

"This time, it's actually going to happen," he said. "It's here. It's for real." He vowed to sleep with the house key under his pillow the night before the family moved from Mason City. O'Dell, wife Linda, daughter Jackie and grandchildren Brooklynn, Audrey and Jakob O'Dell have waited since the flood of June 2008 to move from their damaged home in Mason City.

The family has been working with North Iowa Habitat for Humanity, other agencies and the city of Mason City. The city of Mason City is buying the O'Dells' flood-damaged house but closing dates that were set never occurred. The family waited as rounds of FEMA funding came and went until finally, it was the O'Dells' turn. "Flood buyout (money) happens in different rounds," said Melissa Schoneberg, executive director of North Iowa Habitat for Humanity. "They hadn't been able to move out ... We're so excited for them."

The O'Dells will leave the house they lived in for nearly 25 years. When the flood happened in 2008, water filled their basement and crept to the ground floor. The finished basement was ruined, Linda O'Dell said. Jackie and her children needed to move to the ground floor and the three generations shared one bathroom and the main floor. Bob and Linda O'Dell slept in the dining room.

The family cleaned the basement but when mold returned they were forced back upstairs. During the time the family was trying to find a new house, Bob O'Dell had a stroke. "We just did what we had to do," Linda O'Dell said of coping with her husband's stroke, helping him rehabilitate, dealing with possible relocation and sharing space. The waiting and coping did bring them closer as a family, Bob O'Dell said.

"Everything changes," he said of the flood's consequences. "When I get sad and down in the dumps, I've learned my wife will encourage me. She will say, "At least we are together as a family.'" The O'Dells are together as a family and happy to be in Forest City. Residents of the town volunteered to help move the O'Dells and others have helped during the wait and transition to the new house. "Forest City just seems safer for my grandkids ...," Bob O'Dell said. "Everybody's been so warm and nice."

Rae Yost is editor of the Forest City Summit, a Lee Enterprises newspaper