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Christie Administration Announces 350th Buyout for Blue Acres Program

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Statewide Initiative Reaches Milestone of 500 Accepted Offers for Acquisition

Trenton, NJ - The Sandy Blue Acres Buyout Program, which delivers relief to homeowners in flood-prone communities by moving property owners out of flood-prone areas, has surpassed 350 acquisitions, the Christie Administration announced today. In addition, the program has also reached another milestone with 500 property owners accepting offers, one of the last steps toward final acquisition.

"The Blue Acres Program continues to be a key component of our overall storm resiliency strategy to better prepare New Jersey for future storms and repetitive flooding situations," said Governor Chris Christie. "We are making good progress in moving residents from these flood-prone areas, while giving them a real opportunity to move on and rebuild their lives."

With the recent closure at 74 Paris Road in Lawrence Township, Cumberland County for \$193,000, the 350th home acquisition has been completed. To date, the program has acquired 358 properties overall.

"We know it is difficult for families to leave their homes and start over again," said DEP Commissioner Bob Martin. "We remain committed to keeping the acquisition process as easy as possible to help as many people as we can."

Tim and Helen Mason are among the property owners who have gone through the process, closing the sale of their home on Huff Avenue in Manville, Somerset County, on July 23.

Tim Mason, who built the home 31 years ago with his father-in-law in the oft-flooded Lost Valley section of Manville, said the home has flooded four times over the years, three of which required extensive and expensive repairs and rebuilding, most recently in 2011 when the remnants of Hurricane Irene flooded vast swaths of New Jersey.

The Masons were pleased with the buyout process and are happy to be in a new location in Manville, where they will not have to worry about evacuating when hearing sirens alerting residents to flooding danger.

"To be out of harm's way now and safe, and high and dry hopefully forever, you can't buy that," Tim Mason said. "As you get older, as you go to bed at night, you don't have to be scared that the sirens are going to go off or you're going to have to be evacuated."

The Blue Acres Program, which gives willing homeowners an opportunity to sell their homes at pre-Superstorm Sandy market value, was launched by the DEP on May 16, 2013. The \$300 million buyout program aims to purchase more than 1,000 damaged homes from Sandy or homes in repeatedly flooded areas.

To date, the program has made 683 offers to willing sellers. Additionally, 223 homes have been demolished, creating open space that will help protect communities by buffering against flood waters in future storms.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Flood Hazard Mitigation Grant Program has approved for the Blue Acres Program more than \$158 million in federal funds, which have been processed through the New Jersey Office of Emergency Management.

Additional federal funding to acquire other properties impacted by Sandy is being provided through a second round of federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Disaster Recovery funds allocated to New Jersey by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Blue Acres will continue to submit buyout applications to federal agencies for more properties.

The DEP Blue Acres buyout team works closely with sellers and processes their applications as quickly as possible. The team reaches out to individual homeowners personally and guides them through the acquisition process.

Homeowners interested in selling their homes or who have questions about the buyout program may call the DEP's Blue Acres Program at (609) 984-0500.

For more information on the Blue Acres Program, visit: www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres/blue_flood_ac.html

For more information on Sandy recovery, visit: www.nj.gov/dep/special/hurricane-sandy/

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