



Photos by Mickey Welsh, Advertiser

Alberta Turner sits in front of her damaged home in White Hall.



Tommy Turner shows the roof damage to his mother's home.

May 29, 2008

Woman's home of 30 years damaged

By *Marty Roney*

WHITE HALL -- Alberta Turner has been sleeping in her living room for the past few months, after a falling tree damaged the bedroom of her modest mobile home.

The 88-year-old has lived in the home for 30 years, and she said she's had some good times here. But lately times have been tough.

"I got to sleep in the living room, 'cause there's nothing left of the bedroom back there," she said. "I'm thankful nobody was hurt. If I had been in the bed when that tree broke, I might not be here."

When the hunk of tree fell onto the home, Turner was in the kitchen, getting a glass of water.

"I wasn't feeling good when the storm came up," she said. "I got up to go to the bathroom, and I was thirsty. I heard the boom when it hit the house. I went back there and went to crying. But I was thankful too. I guess the Lord made me thirsty so I would have to get up and get on out of there before the tree came falling down."

White Hall is about 15 miles west of Montgomery, in the heart of the Black Belt. Named for its dark prairie soil, the region is known for its poverty.

Five large dead pine trees surround the single-wide home that she shares with her two sons, ages 72 and 55. Both men have health problems and are unable to work, their mother said.

The top of one of the pines broke off and fell onto the home during a January storm. The gaping hole is covered with sheets of plastic. The makeshift repairs include several tires atop the roof to hold down the plastic.

"It's not nearly waterproof," said Eugene Turner, her grandson. "When it rains, we have to get up there and sweep off the water, so most of it won't spill inside."

The tree wrecked her bedroom and its furniture. The only hope is getting a new home, said Catherine Flowers, director of the Alabama Center for Rural Enterprise, a community services group. Flowers is on the trail of a used mobile home in Vance that she thinks can be donated to the Turners.

But a newer home isn't the only issue. The septic system has stopped working. Sewage pours out on the ground in the backyard.

The home was damaged during Hurricane Katrina, and FEMA gave the family a check for \$128 to cover the damages, Alberta Turner said.

"What's \$128 going to do?" Flowers asked. "This family needs help. There are a lot of families in



Plastic sheeting covers the house.



The damaged roof at the home of Alberta Turner near White Hall, Ala. on Tuesday May 27, 2008. The roof was originally damaged during hurricane Katrina.

Lowndes County that are struggling, but this is one of the worst cases. The Turners deserve a decent place to live."

Alberta Turner doesn't have insurance, and she doesn't own the lot her home is on. Family members own the land, and finding them is going to be difficult, Flowers said.

"The Equal Justice Initiative is working with us to do the research and get title for the land," she said. "We have to find who owns the land before we can move the other trailer in. She knew who owned it 30 years ago, but finding who owns the land now is going to be a challenge."

Going elsewhere isn't an option -- Alberta Turner doesn't want to move.

"It may not be much, but it's my house," she said Tuesday while sitting on a metal chair in the front yard. Three long-coated dogs panted in the scant shade, trying to weather the temperatures and humidity.

"If they can get it fixed, that's fine. If they can get me a new house, well, that's fine too," she said. "But I want to stay here. I've been here an awful long time."

That outlook is widespread in the region, Flowers said.

"We had a family not too long ago that we were able to find a stick built home for them," she said. "The only problem was it was in Chilton County. People just don't want to move, they want to stay near their history and their family. I grew up in the Black Belt, I understand. There's something about that black dirt that gets in your soul."



Alberta Turner sits in front of her damaged home near White Hall, Ala. on Tuesday May 27, 2008. (Montgomery Advertiser, Mickey Welsh)



Alberta Turner, left, her grandson Eugene Turner, center, and son Tommy Turner, right, in front of her home near White Hall, Ala. on Tuesday May 27, 2008.



Broken pipes leak raw sewage at the home of Alberta Turner near White Hall, Ala. on Tuesday May 27, 2008.



The damaged home of Alberta Turner near White Hall, Ala. on Tuesday May 27, 2008. The roof was originally damaged during hurricane Katrina.