

Tale of a family caught in the funnel

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Russell Iezzi, holding photos he took of flooding at his home, indicates where the water hit hardest.

NORTH COVENTRY — Living at the bottom of a hill, Russell and Marion Iezzi had always had some flooding problems at their modest Neiman Road home.

So they put some controls in place. A sand mound they used for a septic system before being hooked up to the sewer line directed water coming down the hill around the house. The water was under control.

That all changed two years ago.

Russell remembers it well because it was graduation day for Owen J. Roberts High School, and he was on his way there to work the gate when Marion called on his cell phone.

Water was tearing down the hill “and it was so deep at one point, it was surging up around my knees,” Marion recalled.

They have photos — the kind that paint a picture that would give pause to any homeowner..



Russell Iezzi, above, shows his storm water controls that were overrun. At left, his wife, Marion, stands ankle deep in a storm's flow.

"I didn't mind so much when the water came across the yard, but when it comes into the sun room, that's just too much," said Marion.

They weren't the only victims.

Next door, the spring house for the home owned by Russell's parents was inundated.

"That's their drinking water source, but it was coming out of the tap muddy and they couldn't use it," he said.

The Iezzis had never had problems this severe. What had changed?

Turns out, it was a driveway.

In 1997 or 1998, John Ruckle put in a dirt driveway and cleared about two of the nearly seven acres he owned on the top of a hill off Laurelwood Road, said Kevin Hennessey, North Coventry's township manager.

"What it did was create a funnel, and 34 acres on that hill now drains through that driveway," he said.

The couple tried several fixes.

"I actually built a portable dam out of plywood, and I would set it up when the forecast was bad to direct the water away from the house," said Russell.

But it didn't work.

"The water actually came down with such force, it got under the siding and into the studs of the house," he said.

Then Russell spent between \$10,000 and \$13,000 on yard renovations to deal with the problem.

"But we had another big rain and it washed away all the grass seed and top soil," he said.

"It comes so fast, so quickly, you can hear the rushing sound of it from inside the house," said Marion, who said she still gets nervous when it rains.

"You don't know what's coming down the hill with that water," said Russell. "We've had

people's garbage cans end up in our backyard.”

“You could go white water rafting in our backyard,” said Marion. “People would drive by, see what was happening, stop and say ‘I’m so sorry.’ I just wanted to sell the house and move.”

But the couple, who bought their house in 1986, was not ready to give up yet.

What they did instead was bring their problem to the township supervisors.

It took time, and an election, but this spring the supervisors finally agreed to extend a storm water pipe up Roberta Drive to the top of the hill where the problem starts.

Roberta Drive runs parallel to the course of the water that ends up in the Iezzis’ yard and it’s hoped the new system will capture the storm water as it crosses Laurelwood Drive, and convey it safely to the bottom, into wetlands on the other side of Neiman Road.

Whether it solves the problem remains to be seen, but the Iezzis are just glad the township agreed to do something.

“I have to say the new supervisors were very helpful,” said Marion, who spent many a night at the supervisors’ meetings, cajoling officials and asking questions.

“They actually came out here and looked, and then they were more aware of the circumstances,” she said.

And the circumstances were more than just a problem for the Iezzis. In the winter, the water would freeze as it crossed Neiman Road, making it a problem for any motorist unfortunate enough to drive by at the wrong time.

“It just froze, and the whole road became nothing but ice,” said Marion.

And in the summer, it was undermining the road. “I spent my own money to keep Neiman Road from collapsing,” said Russell.

“PennDOT had to come out here three or four times,” Marion said. “I kept telling them, you’re going to need bigger stones.”