

## SPORTS

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# The West News

Covering Bessemer Cutoff, western Birmingham, Fairfield, Forestdale, Adamsville, Graysville, Hueytown, Midfield, Pleasant Grove and other west Jefferson County communities

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The Birmingham News

Wednesday • March 31, 2010 • Section W



NEWS STAFF/LINDA STELTER

Decades after most people retire, civil engineer Richard S. Woodruff, 97, donates his time and expertise to help solve the problem of flooding on Village Creek.

## Vigilant about Village Creek

Woodruff gives tenacious technical advice on fixing flooding

By ANNE RUISE  
News staff writer

While most people his age are long retired, civil engineer Richard S. Woodruff, 97, is still at work, trying to end flooding on Birmingham's Village Creek.

"If it wasn't fun, I wouldn't do it," said Woodruff, a longtime Mountain Brook resident who is technical director of the Village Creek Society.

He's a Binghamton, N.Y., native who's never lived along the 44-mile waterway that stretches from its source near Huffman High School westward to the Black Warrior River. Yet his part-time volunteer work with the society is a job that has Woodruff's full commitment.

"He's tenacious," said Mable B. Anderson, the society's executive director. "He wakes up thinking about Village Creek and gets it done."

"He's very amazing," said John Meehan, the society's field director. "He keeps us going."

Flooding along the creek has for decades vexed residents threatened by the rising waters that followed heavy rain. Hundreds of families and some busi-

nesses in a flood-prone section of the creek from Ensley to near Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport have been relocated since the late 1980s.

Woodruff said he's been reading about flooding on Village Creek for the past 50 years.

"I wondered why in the world Village Creek made news and they did nothing about it," he said.

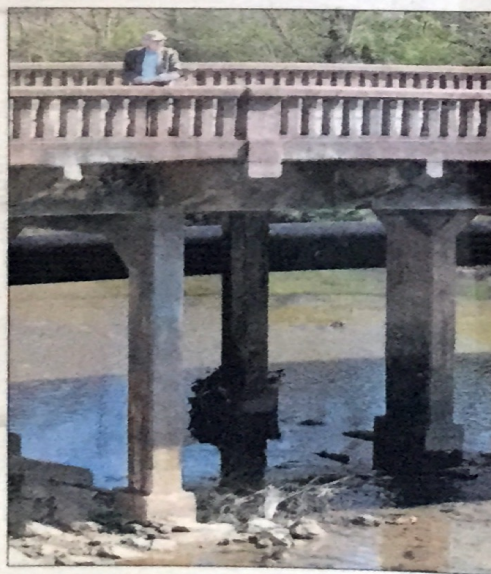
His curiosity, and his background with Alabama Power Company in hydrology — the studying of water and its movement — led to his eventual involvement with the Village Creek Society, Woodruff said.

"I felt I wanted to help the city do something about the flooding," he said.

In his years of studying its waters, Woodruff said he's traveled its length and crossed every bridge over the creek.

Three measures would prevent flooding in Ensley, he said: replacing the Avenue F bridge over Village Creek, relocating under the creek a 3-foot round sewer pipe that runs alongside the bridge and building a Gabion retaining wall along both sides of the creek between Avenue F and Avenue W.

The Avenue F bridge sits



Civil engineer Richard S. Woodruff, here on the Avenue F bridge over Village Creek, says a single span structure in place of the current bridge is vital to ending flooding.

on piers, and those posts trap trees, tree limbs and litter, as does the sewer pipe, Woodruff said. As trash and debris collect and the water gets high, flow is impeded, which causes flooding. A single-span bridge without piers and an underground sewer pipe would alleviate flooding.

The Gabion wall, which Woodruff drew plans for, would improve the stability of the creek banks and stabilize water flow in that area, he said.

The society has applied for \$3.5 million in federal

stimulus funds to pay for a new bridge and the Gabion wall, Anderson said. It's also applied for \$4.8 million in federal funding to relocate the sewer pipe.

Woodruff has also worked with Birmingham city and Alabama Department of Transportation officials on plans for a greenway trail along the creek between Avenue F and Avenue W. These plans also call for a park in Ensley with an outdoor classroom and other amenities, such as a picnic

## Bingo operators to open a Midfield hall

By TORAINE NORRIS  
News staff writer

At least three bingo operators have expressed an interest in locating in Midfield, with the first set to open by Easter, Mayor Gary Richardson said last week.

A bingo hall operated by Israel Community Development Corporation is planning to open no later than Easter weekend in the Woodfield Square Shopping Center, said representative Calvin Biggers. Recent moves by state Attorney General Troy King to assume command of Gov. Bob Riley's Task force on Illegal Gambling allowed hall operators some security to open, he said.

At least 11 e-bingo halls have already opened or reopened in the Bessemer Cutoff since March 12. Bingo halls remained closed through last week in the city of Bessemer, where there is a dispute over whether the city has a valid bingo ordinance.

Besides the Israel Development group, two other operators are showing interest in opening in other areas in the city, Richardson said. One group wants to open in the Midfield

### TOWN HALL MEETING

► **When:** 6 p.m. Thursday

► **Where:** Midfield Community Center

► **Topics:** Bingo, economic development, finance issues

Plaza Shopping Center, he said.

"We look like we're going to have operations within the next month," Richardson said.

A town hall meeting will be held Thursday night at the Midfield Community Center at 6 p.m. to discuss bingo in Midfield, as well as economic development and finance issues.

Midfield, which passed an electronic bingo ordinance in December, will become the latest area city to allow the gaming. Just last week the City Council approved lowering the fee it charges vendors who do business with bingo hall operators from \$25,000 a year to \$250 annually. The change will make the city more competitive in halls, although its size and the requirements on machines will limit the number of

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### BESSEMER CITY SCHOOLS

## New superintendent says he's closely watching budget

By ANITA DEBRO  
News staff writer

Newly selected Bessemer City Schools Superintendent Michael Foster said his first challenge will be to determine the effects of the state's education budget on Bessemer.

After serving as interim superintendent of the system since October 2008, Foster was unanimously selected by the Bessemer School Board last week as the permanent superintendent.

The school board will next negotiate a contract with Foster, who has been with Bessemer City Schools the last 33 years.

Foster said he is concerned about how state funding will affect staffing.

"I have to figure out if I am going to be able to keep my people," he said.

Foster told school board members last week that the system could lose about 20 employees based on preliminary figures for how much money the system could receive from the state's school budget.

"We are at the mercy of the state budgetary process," he said.

The Alabama House of Representatives was ex-



Michael Foster

pected this week to debate next year's education budget. A budget approved by a House committee last week would spend \$5.5 billion from the Education Trust Fund, the main source of dollars for schools. That would be a 3.2 percent increase from this year.

Foster said he will continue to watch closely the education budget as it progresses through the Legislature.

The Bessemer system has so far avoided losing teachers and other employees by dipping into its healthy reserves to make up lost income from the state.

Foster was serving as the director of federal programs before he was tapped interim superintendent. He has worked both jobs for the last 15 months.

He said last week that finding a replacement for

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