

Update on the relocation of the residents of Hyde Park, Augusta, GA

By Charles Utley, Community Organizer and Campaign Coordinator

The residents of Hyde Park have begun to see their dreams fulfilled. Mr. Lou Zeller, Executive Director of Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, best describes this community when he says “This community has been past being shovel ready.” For 15 years this community has been looking forward to the day when they would be moving to a new location free from pollution and contamination. Relocation is a process that has taught this community that persistence is a virtue. Therefore, I would encourage any community who is seeking relocation to realize that everything is not equal when it comes to relocation. There are many factors that a community needs to be aware of. Many members have passed on without seeing this dream come true, but the fight and their legacy will not go unrewarded. Relocation has ignited a new birth of pride in the community, because what they were fighting for has begun to come to fruition.

Environmental Justice has played a major role in this community. The book “*Polluted Promises*,” written by Dr. Melissa Checker, is now available in bookstores across America. Students who desire to earn a degree in Environmental Justice and or Anthropology are now required to read this book at many major colleges and universities, the reason being that injustice was experienced by this community. An Environmental Protection Agency documentary entitled “*Despaired but Determined*” was developed with the assistance of Lou Zeller, just one of the many contributions provided by BREDL. There have been numerous studies on health effects, soil and water contamination and pathways, hearings on Capitol Hill and visits to other polluted communities who have faced these same types of Environmental Injustices. It all comes down to Environmental Justice being equal and equitable for all communities. It is a sad thing to have to say, but the money that was spent on trying to prove that this community was safe enough for the residents to stay could have moved this community ten times over with funds to spare.

Although the process has begun and progress is moving slowly, there are still many obstacles to be overcome. We hope through the efforts of the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League Environmental Justice Programs we will prepare other communities a pathway, a blueprint to follow. There is a beacon of hope that through this process it will serve as the gateway for other communities.