

## Agencies face deadline on Ike funds

By T.J. Aulds | Posted: Wednesday, September 1, 2010 12:00 am

It wasn't too long ago that Lucy Rangel-Click was embarrassed to let people see her house. After Hurricane Ike she had only about \$14000 in federal assistance to replace the drywall and siding fix the floor and repair the roof.

Replacing the walls and paying for her living expenses ate up that cash leaving the lifelong Galveston resident with a blue tarp roof a warped floor and an ugly exterior.

Work crews arrived at her house last week to finish the repairs thanks to funding from a Social Services Block Grant managed by Catholic Charities.

"It looks better" Rangel-Click said. "It doesn't look like an eyesore anymore."

Unless Congress takes action soon the relief Rangel-Click and 59 other Galveston County residents are getting won't be available for the many more who are living in houses damaged by Ike.

Catholic Charities is one of 60 agencies that received about \$36.8 million in federal aid to provide Ike-related services including social service care transportation assistance mental health care health care and home repairs.

In many cases lead agencies like Catholic Charities the University of Texas Medical Branch Lutheran Social Services and the Gulf Coast Center serve as the funding conduit to smaller sub-agencies to provide aid.

The deadline for the agencies to spend that money is the end of this month.

Catholic Charities had about \$3.45 million for its housing repair program in Galveston County from the \$10.45 million granted. Houses in the program thus far are split evenly between the mainland and island officials said.

Red tape state regulations and compliance rules delayed the start of the program. Because it took so long for the money to become available volunteer and nonprofit groups that swarmed the county after the storm had to return home so Catholic Charities turned to local firms to get the repairs done.

Harold Fattig southern regional director for Catholic Charities said the group turned to Galveston-based Sullivan Land Interests one of the primary contractors for the city of Galveston and Galveston County Disaster Housing Rebuild and Repair programs. Sullivan tapped Rawlins Residential Builders and other local subcontractors.

Unlike the city of Galveston and county housing programs that are focused on making major repairs or building new houses the Catholic Charity housing program focuses on smaller jobs. The group is restricted from spending more than 25 percent of a house's pre-Ike appraised value for the repairs.

Fattig said the focus has been to seek out those "blue roofs" referring to tarps that were supposed to be temporary covers. Many still are in place almost two years after Ike made landfall.

"Many of those homeowners are senior citizens who just don't have the money for basic repairs" Fattig said. "And they aren't used to asking for help. They don't realize they are eligible for benefits."

Fattig said a community survey by the Mainland Children's Partnership found more than 200 blue roofs in Texas City La Marque Hitchcock and Dickinson. While many homeowners need help they might not get it unless Congress approves an extension of the Sept. 30 deadline for spending those funds.

Fattig said even if a house is under repair when the deadline hits all work must stop unless the extension is granted.

"We are fortunate we have Sen. (John) Cornyn behind this" Joe Compian of Gulf Coast Interfaith said. "It's really a bipartisan effort because we have people in other states who would be affected by this too."

In an e-mail to Compian Cornyn's staff said the extension for the social service block grants would be a priority when Congress reconvenes Sept. 13.

"The need is there we just need the time" Fattig said. "We are not asking for more money. We are just asking for more time."