



SANDY SURVIVOR

A BEACHFRONT ICF HOME STILL PROVIDES SHELTER FOR THE OWNER

Text by SHERRY BOYD

Based upon research and photography by Bill Naegeli

TEN YEARS AGO WHEN JOHN SETH SOCHACKI III RECOMMENDED TO HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW THAT HER NEW HOME ON FRONT STREET IN UNION BEACH, NEW JERSEY SHOULD BE BUILT USING INSULATING CONCRETE FORMS (ICFS), LITTLE DID HE KNOW THAT IT WOULD ONE DAY PROVIDE A REFUGE FOR HE AND HIS WIFE AND THEIR TWO CHILDREN DURING A SUPER STORM THAT DESTROYED ALL THE OTHER SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES ON THE SAME BLOCK. AS JOHN RESEARCHED ICFS HE FACED ROAD BLOCKS AT EVERY TURN. YET, HE BECAME MORE AND MORE CONVINCED THAT ICFS OFFERED THE MOST SAFE, SECURE AND ENERGY-EFFICIENT OPTION AVAILABLE. IN THE END HE ACTED AS THE GENERAL CONTRACTOR AND OVERSAW ALL ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT.

Now, John's mother-in-law, Leonora Hallet, is grateful for the foresight, initiative and perseverance that John invested into completing the Hallet House. She happily welcomed the four Sochackis to come there during Hurricane Sandy, which turned into the historic super storm of October 29, 2012. The whole family safely rode out the onslaught in the beachfront house. Leonora's grandsons even took a video that has well over 90,000 hits on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ady9mc7fdTU>. They continue to live there.

Two houses northwest of Hallet House are gone and only their foundations and rubble remain. The house next-door to the southeast has been condemned, and three doors farther over sits the odd shaped remains of a house that was featured on the cover of Newsweek.



The Hallet house lost some exterior siding, and some damp drywall will have to be replaced. That's the full extent of damages.

The Hallet House may just be the best argument for building to assure resilience. Throughout the storm and afterwards, Leonora and the rest of her family have enjoyed the uninterrupted comfort and security of the two-story, 4,000 square foot ICF home. Even as high waves hit the sides of the house, the homeowner and her family were unafraid. The family points out that ICF building seems to be overlooked both technically and literally. Soon after the storm, FEMA representatives hovered above the ICF house in helicopters. Processions of politicians and reporters showed up in the following days, yet none stopped in to ask how the one green Cape Cod style house remains occupied and in excellent condition, while all the other single-family homes have orange signs declaring them unsound, unsafe, and unsuited for occupancy.

Bill Naegeli is an ICF distributor and builder who heard of the Hallet House from a relief worker and researched it to provide the story about it to this magazine. He says, "It is painfully obvious that we can build homes that can withstand significant hurricanes, tornadoes, and even fires, yet the average homeowner is practically unaware that this technology exists!" Naegeli emphatically says, "What was John's biggest hurdle in building the ICF house? It turns out to be the building industry as a whole!"

There is another story to be told, one too convoluted and surprising to cover in this issue – the story behind why John Seth Sochacki III had to become his own general contractor. There is a follow-up story to come with more details. It is also a story of opportunity for ICF subcontractors, like Ken Brown, who went on to become a general contractor after he saw Hallet House completed. Let's explore how we can tackle the dilemmas and obstacles that are faced by homeowners who see the value and can't find builders willing to take the step into the unknown to build safer and stronger ICF homes. How do we tackle the obstacles? 