

Superfund NEWS

October 2018

Environmental Activist: LOIS GIBBS

Lois Marie Gibbs (born June 25, 1951)[1] is an American environmental activist. A primary organizer of the Love Canal Homeowners Association, Lois Gibbs brought public attention to the environmental crisis in Love Canal. Her actions resulted in the evacuation of over 800 families.[2] She founded the non-profit, Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste in 1981, to



help train and support local activists with their environmental work. She continues to work with the organization, renamed the Center for Health, Environment, and Justice (CHEJ).

Gibbs's involvement in environmental causes began in 1978 when she discovered that her 5-year-old son's elementary school in Niagara Falls, New York was built on a toxic waste dump. The complete story was reported on and discovered by Niagara Gazette reporter Michael H. Brown as well as Calspan, a private research group who discovered the chemical leak at Love Canal.[3] Subsequent investigation revealed that her entire neighborhood, Love Canal, had been built on top of this dump. With no

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San Jacinto River clean-up receives national commendation

Jackie Young wins national award CHEJ: "Champions for Change"

NEW YORK CITY – At a special awards gala on September 6th in the center of Manhattan, the Center for Health, Environment & Justice gave out three awards for outstanding work to save the environment.

One of these awards was presented to Houston's Jackie Young, Director of the TxHEA or Texas Health and Environment Alliance.

The award was presented by Lois Gibbs, who is famous for exposing the hazardous conditions at the Love Canal. Also present was actress and film director Patricia Arquette, who is making a movie about events at Love Canal. CHEJ and Gibbs were celebrating 40 years of progress since the crisis at Love Canal, in Niagara Falls, New York. The ceremony was called "Champions for Change" and honored ongoing work with communities at risk from environmental harms.

Other recipients of the award were Dr. Beverly Paigen, a community scientist who documented health impacts at Love Canal, and PUSH BUFFALO, or People United for Sustainable Housing, Buffalo, New York. They worked on affordable housing, equitable jobs and ecological sustainability for the West Side of Buffalo.



NEW YORK CITY: Environmentalist Lois Gibbs presents the "Champions for Change" award to Jackie Young, for her work in getting EPA to clean up the San Jacinto River Superfund site.

Lois Gibbs, and CHEJ, for over 38 years through training, coalition building, and one-on-one technical and organizing assistance has been mentoring a movement and empowering people to prevent harm to human health caused by exposure to hazardous environmental conditions.

Lois Gibbs's story was portrayed by Marsha Mason in the 1982 TV film, "Lois Gibbs and the Love Canal." The film is based on the true story of Lois Gibbs, a housewife in Niagara Falls, NY who spearheads her community's battle against Hooker Chemical. At first, her husband dismisses the idea that an old chemical dump site beneath their 36-block neighborhood has anything to do with a rash of child ailments. But Gibbs perseveres, circulating a petition, accepting the role of head of the Homeowners Association and leading a fierce

legal battle for compensation.

Visit to EPA Washington DC
Following the awards ceremony, Jackie Young joined many of the same parties meetings with Congressional representatives, and in a special meeting with EPA administrators in Washington DC on September 12th.

The meeting took place at the EPA Headquarters at 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington DC.

The agenda included a discussion of reinstating "Polluter Pays" fees to stabilize the Superfund Program and accelerate the cleanup of contaminated sites. CHEJ says that a fundamental problem with the Superfund program is inadequate funding, including Orphan sites, testing, cleanup, legal action and technical assistance grants for communities near Superfund sites.

Who is involved in the San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund?

US EPA

The federal Environmental Protection Agency is the lead in dealing with the Superfund site. Congress has designated them with the responsibility to solve the problem.

PRP

Potential Responsible Parties include successors to the perpetrators of the Waste Pits. These include International Paper, and Waste Management.

US CONGRESS

Most legislators whose district includes the San Jacinto River, have expressed the need to remove the Waste Pits. This includes Congressmen Gene Green, Brian Babin, Ted Poe and others.

HARRIS COUNTY

County Attorney Vince Ryan led a lawsuit to make the Responsible Parties pay for remediation of the site. He won a \$29.2 million dollar judgement to be spent on environmental improvements in the area.

SJRC/THEA

A Citizens movement, led by previous Highlands resident Jackie Young, has been the leading voice to have the Waste Pits totally removed. She heads San Jacinto River Coalition, and the new Texas Health and Environmental Alliance, Inc.

KEEPIPCAPPED

A Citizens Group named San Jacinto Citizens Against Pollution located in Baytown has a web site espousing its belief that a permanent cap is the best solution. Thomas Knickerbocker is their attorney, but the leadership is anonymous.

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prior experience in community activism, Gibbs organized her neighbors and formed the Love Canal Homeowners Association. Gibbs created a petition and reached out to the residents of her neighborhood by going door-to-door to gather support. [3] Gibbs' efforts centered her role as a mother fighting to protect her children's health. She led her community in a battle against the local, state, and federal governments by presenting the signatures to the New York State Department of Health. [3] After years of struggle, 833 families were eventually evacuated, and cleanup of Love Canal began. National press coverage made Lois Gibbs a household name. In addition, president Jimmy Carter mentioned Gibbs as the key grassroots leader in the Love Canal movement during 1980. [3] Her efforts also led to the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, or Superfund, which is used to locate and clean up toxic waste sites throughout the United States.

In 1980, Gibbs formed the Citizens' Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, later renamed the Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ) in 1998, [4] where she currently serves as Executive Director. CHEJ is a grassroots environmental crisis center that provides information, resources, technical assistance and training to community groups around the nation. CHEJ seeks to form strong local organizations in order to protect neighborhoods from exposure to hazardous wastes.

Gibbs has authored several books about the Love Canal story and the effects of toxic waste. Her story was dramatized in the 1982 made-for-TV movie *Lois Gibbs: the Love Canal Story*, in which she was played by Marsha Mason.

EPA completes San Jacinto River Waste Pits interviews

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HIGHLANDS – Three environmental agencies were in town last week, to interview residents about their experiences and opinions on the San Jacinto River Waste Pits, or Superfund.

The team was led by the EPA's Janetta Coats, a Community Involvement Coordinator, and included representatives from the Texas Health and Human Services Department, and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

The team interviewed interested residents for two days, at the Highlands Community Center, and then held a Round Table wrap-up session on the final afternoon, Wednesday, September 12.

Coats said that this interview process was a required part of the Superfund process. Responses will be included in a final version of a document called the Community Involvement Plan. A draft copy of this is now available on the EPA website.

Although the interviews were individual and confidential, the public was invited to sit in on the final Round Table. At this session, about 20 people attended. Included were the interview team, concerned residents, environmental activists, journalists, and attorneys for aggrieved parties and environmental issues.

Coats started the Round Table by noting that all information about the Waste Pits is available at the Stratford Library in Highlands, as well as on the EPA website. Citizens may also call an information number, 800-533-3508 to discuss the site or ask questions.

Coats had prepared a list of questions as prompts for the assembled group and those



The interview team included Janetta Coats, left, of the EPA, and other representatives of the TDHHS, Texas Health and Human Services Department, and the TCEQ, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. They met for two days at the Highlands Community Center, and interviewed residents who volunteered to share their information and opinions.

who had been interviewed.

Simple questions included: "Are you aware of the site?" and "Are you aware of any controversial concerns about the site?"

She also asked if anyone was aware of the activity taking place on the site.

She wanted to know how residents perceived the EPA and its work. In response to this, it was suggested that more notices and information should be furnished to the community. It was suggested the Home Owners Associations, and Civic Clubs could be a vehicle for distributing information.

Coats asked what health concerns individuals had. She was told that some people had developed endometriosis, a disease of the reproductive system.

Coats was asked by the group why fishing was still allowed in these polluted waters. They said posting signs was good but ignored by many. It was



Janetta Coats, EPA coordinator

suggested that a large billboard might be effective.

Coats asked what information should be given to the public, and the answer was more about the dangers of Dioxin.

She asked what media were followed by residents: social media, newspapers, school notices, and service clubs were answered.

Coats also wanted to know how often to communicate, and was told "often" by every media type, and local speaking engagements.

Who is involved in the San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund?

USArmy COE

The Army Corps of Engineers has completed Technical Studies on the Environmental impact of 6+ strategies to Cap or Remove the toxic wastes. Their recommendations are included in a 237 page report, favoring a modified cap over removal, but stating either is possible.

TPWD

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department was designated by the Legislature, with the help of Representative Wayne Smith, to administer \$10 million of the lawsuit settlement funds for environmental projects along the River.

HC PCT 2

Pct. 2 received \$10 million of the \$29.2 million settlement, and plans to use it for environmental projects within 5 miles of the Waste Pits, according to Commissioner Jack Morman.

HARRIS COUNTY

Various departments are involved, including Grants Administration, Pollution Control, and Public Health.

GBF

Galveston Bay Foundation maintains a website with information on all of the Waste Pits parties actions, and other matters of interest to the environmental health of the River and Galveston Bay.

OTHERS

- TCEQ
- TDHHS
- US Coast Guard
- Private Attorneys
- Houston Chronicle
- City of Baytown
- KRIV ch26
- Star-Courier