

St. Charles Herald-GU

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Shell under fire

Shell land purchase draws heat

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On Wednesday, the Concerned Citizens of Norco and the Louisiana Bucket Brigade staged a protest in the Norco community known as Diamond, bearing signs that read "Shame on Shell" and "We Shell Overcome." Residents there are very upset about a stretch of land that Shell Chemical has purchased called the Gaspard Line.

"The Gaspard Line is supposed to be a buffer zone," said resident Larry Brown, who has lived in the community all of his life.

The property is located between East and Mary Streets and extends from River Road to the first railroad track.

Shell Public Information Officer Lilly Galland, said that the purchase of the Gaspard Line was a condition of the purchase of desired land on the Mississippi River bature. The same owner that the bature was purchased from owns the Gaspard Line and made that a condition of the sale. The total amount of the sale was \$158,000.

Some residents fear that their neighborhood is being enveloped by Shell. "These people feel trapped and now they are being completely encircled by this chemical giant," said Anne Rolfes, director of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade.

What angers some residents even more is that Shell is buying unoccupied property, but is not



ANGRY E. STREET RESIDENT Larry Brown expresses his concern with Shell's property purchase.

buying their residential property. "You mean to tell me that grass and trees come before human beings? That hurts me," said Gaynell Johnson, a Diamond resident.

The president of the Concerned Citizens of Norco, Margie Richard, stated, "Fifty years ago, Shell moved in and said they only

wanted a tiny piece of property. Then they expanded all the way to my front door."

Galland said that there should be no reason for the residents to feel surrounded because, "Shell will not develop that land commercially, but rather let the residents decide what should be done with it. We will clear the land of

trash and debris and then let Diamond decide what should be done, whether that be a park or a walking trail or something else."

But that did not satisfy Brown, who said, "Who wants to take their children to a park that's filled with fumes and chemicals." Rolfes also remarked, "They say

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that it will be a park, but who knows. It could very well turn into pipeline in a few months." Also, resident Janie Campbell spoke out saying, "If they cut all these trees down to make a park, there's going to be more fumes and toxins coming into our neighborhood."

Shell also believes that Norco has seen the Gaspard Line as a racial barrier that they, "...see as an opportunity to break down and remove the division in the community," said Galland.

Shell and the Motiva Refinery both have programs to buy the fenceline residential property on Cathy and Washington Streets, but Diamond residents want the companies to extend that to the rest of the community. "You're going to move them out and leave half of their families here with all of these toxins. That's an injustice," said Campbell.

Shell has no plans to buy any other residential property other than fenceline property, said Galland. "Our intention has never

been to buy out the town of Norco."

Galland also pointed out that Shell has plans to, "reduce emissions by 30 percent in the next three years and to reduce flaring by 50 percent." She went on to say, "Shell is dedicated to continue to promote community development through the Norco Community Fund and other avenues."

The purchase took many Diamond residents by surprise. "We knew nothing about the purchase until it happened to be mentioned at a meeting that Gaynell and I attended. Otherwise, we still wouldn't know about it," said East Street resident Loretta Jenkins. Galland responded that, "Shell never discusses land transactions with anyone but the landowners."

Nevertheless, feelings of anger, confusion and fear run through many of Diamond's residents.



SHELL OIL'S RECENT purchase of the Gaspard Line, shown here, has many residents up in arms, sparking Wednesday's protest.

"We're just test subjects to them, and they need to stop treating us like a herd of sheep," said Brown just before he stormed off down the street.

Galland disagrees, stating, "Shell has been here for 75 years and the only way we can succeed

is if the community succeeds. That is our message to the citizens of Norco."

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