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January 29, 2008

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The last item on the moving truck outside Mike Puterbough's dilapidated old home was the wood stove he bought 12 years ago when his landlord refused to replace the broken furnace.

Now his landlord – the federal government – is evicting him, the latest resident to be turfed out of houses on 7,500 hectares of farmland expropriated in 1972 for a proposed airport in north Pickering.

"I've been very angry but today I just feel complete sadness," Puterbough said as movers emptied his home of 34 years in tiny Brougham.

Yesterday's move was the conclusion of a three-year court battle against eviction orders by Public Works and Transport Canada, which manages the properties. Puterbough, 59, says they've told him his house will be torn down because it's not worth fixing.

In an ironic twist, the government installed a new high-efficiency furnace last year and finally hooked it up to the gas line this winter.

"How can a landlord neglect the property then use that as an excuse for evicting a tenant?" asks Puterbough, who's done countless repairs and built a two-bedroom second-storey addition on the house where his three daughters grew up.

As he pulled up stakes, a few dozen supporters, neighbours and politicians gathered to say goodbye and protest the eviction. They carried a coffin representing his earlier refusal to leave "over my dead body."

Now battle-weary and sick from a heart condition, he mourns the loss of a community – "my larger family" – as much as his home.

"It was a really dynamic community, a 'Leave it to Beaver' town where kids could play safely and we had potluck dinners. ... They have destroyed it."

Now Brougham is a ghost town with houses boarded up or torn down and only a handful of families remaining, he said.

"They made it clear an airport was coming but none of us expected this treatment at the end of 34 years," he added. He'll move in with family in Uxbridge temporarily but after that "I have no idea."

Another resident, Gord McGregor, shared Puterbough's sadness, calling the eviction another stage in the "slow death of our community by strangulation at the hands of federal government bureaucrats."

Land Over Landings, a citizens' group which McGregor helped found, and Liberal MP Mark Holland argue that Ottawa has mismanaged the properties and is systematically removing tenants to pave the way for an airport.

A needs-assessment report by the Greater Toronto Airports Authority is expected to be ready for review by Transport Canada this summer, a spokesperson said. A decision won't be made before 2009.

But Peter Rodrigues of LOL says the conclusion will be "bogus" because the GTAA decided long ago a Pickering airport was a good idea. "The case for an airport is absolutely not qualified," he said. "We already have the Oshawa, Buttonville and Hamilton airports and we're nowhere near the capacity needed."

As Puterbough locked the door of the cold wooden structure, water gushed from the kitchen tap. It's one repair he's not going to do.