

# Last home comes down on slide street

**Eric Carpenter, Orange County Register, 4-27-10**

ANAHEIM – Neighbors gathered along Maple Tree Drive on Tuesday to watch the last of four homes in a landslide area being torn down by the California Department of Transportation.

And nearly every person used the same word to describe the scene – sad.

"We miss all of our neighbors, all of the children. It's truly sad," said Nell Luce, an original homeowner who has lived on the east side of Maple Tree since 1965. "It's just not the same neighborhood feel anymore."

Caltrans began bulldozing the homes in February. Agency officials had hoped to be finished two weeks ago, but rain and other delays pushed back that schedule.

Caltrans owns the slope behind the homes near the junction of the 55 and 91 freeways. Several of the homes above the slope began gradually sliding after a freeway-widening project in the 1990s.

The four latest homes to be torn down are in addition to six others that were already razed along Maple Tree and along Circle Haven – the street below.

Caltrans has spent millions to settle lawsuits and relocate homeowners. Several other homeowners are still in litigation with the transportation department.

"This was a close-knit community, where people had parties and celebrated together," said Jack Gates, 63, who has lived on Maple Tree for 35 years and raised two children there. "Now, one by one, it's being taken away from us."

For now the lots are being left empty and ungated. Only signs at the back of the properties warn: "No trespassing."

Caltrans has informed residents the properties eventually will be fenced off, but in the meantime, remaining residents say they worry about outsiders loitering.

Neighbors said they have reported more incidents of theft and graffiti in recent months – something they attribute to the vacant lots. Gates said one neighbor had items stolen from his backyard three times in the past six months and has had to paint over graffiti on his back wall 16 times.

Natalie Fossum, whose home on Maple Tree is in the city of Orange directly next to an Anaheim home that was torn down last month, said people have gathered on the empty lot next to hers and thrown rocks into her backyard pool.

"It's very sad to see this," she said. "I'd like to live here another 20 years."

Gates said he has no plans to move, either. But he no longer feels like he lives in a complete neighborhood.

He'd like to see the lots turned into tennis courts or some other recreational use with restricted access.

"Some people have suggested it might help my property values because it will be a better view with no homes blocking us," Gates said.

But even if that were the case, he added: "What good does that do me if I don't have any more friends around me to enjoy the neighborhood with?"