

## Organizations and community members rally to help Valley fire victims

Written by Denise Rockenstein

Wednesday, 16 September 2015 02:55 -

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LAKE COUNTY, Calif. – The entire community and beyond is rallying in support of victims of the Valley fire, which in its first 48 hours, claimed several hundred homes and displaced thousands of residents in the the Cobb, Kelseyville, Middletown and Hidden Valley Lake areas.

Businesses, civics clubs, campgrounds, hotels, restaurants and countless volunteers at relief sites around the county have banded together to help ease the suffering of those displaced by the fire.

Donations to take care of the people, as well as the animals, are pouring in from near and far as the community faces its third, and most destructive, fire disaster in the past six weeks.

“I’ve never seen so many people come together. It’s incredible,” evacuee Bob Vieira said.

Vieira and his wife, Linda, evacuated to the parking lot at Clearlake Walmart from Hidden Valley Lake late Saturday night, escaping the blaze with three Rhode Island Red hens.

“Our house seems to be OK. It got a little scary when the flames started coming through the backyard. We decided it was time to go, and,” he said smiling, “I couldn’t leave my girls there.”

The hens appeared content Monday afternoon in their makeshift coop around a tree next to the couple’s RV, even laying eggs Vieira said he shared with other evacuees in the parking lot camp.

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Vieira said he is impressed and comforted by the show of support and generosity he has been seeing.



“Walmart has been great. They welcomed us into parking lot; they're cleaning up every day. There are supplies coming in from Sonoma County and all over. The Salvation Army has been here to see how they can help. People have been barbecuing everyday. Out here, everybody is for everybody. It's amazing,” he said.

Members of the Coalition Crawlers and Low Budget Off Road loaded up with donations from the Monterey and Hollister Hills areas as soon as they heard news of the fire.

Member Sage Scherman of Carmel Valley said they have friends in the area and they just wanted to be of some assistance. They brought supplies, a big barbecue, music and plenty of helping hands.

“Everyone here has been through a lot. It's confusing,” he said. “We just wanted to help out and add some cheer to the situation.”

A group of local volunteers, of no particular organization, set up a donation/pick-up site in the parking lot full of clothing, blankets, food and other supplies.

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“We just planned to cook until we ran out of hot dogs and hamburgers but the supplies just keep coming,” Rachel Collins of Clearlake, said.

Performance Mechanical owner Phil Harris, along with his staff and friends, also established a relief site at Walmart, filled with clothing for all sizes and ages as well as other necessities.

Volunteer Breanna Sanders said there are plenty of clothes, but, as the rain began to fall, she conveyed a need for tarps and tents and other items to help keep evacuees warm and dry through the elements.

Middletown evacuee Shelly Rossetta said she appreciates the overwhelming support the community is showing. “There is no 'living' at this point. It's surviving,” she said.

Rosetta said she is fortunate that her house made it through the fire and appreciates the generosity of the community, especially, Blue Fish Cove, in Glenhaven, which she said is only charging her family \$50 for their nightly stays.

She said recovery is already being discussed amongst her neighbors. “We are talking about rebuilding in Middletown and we are looking forward to the community coming together to do that.”

Walmart Manager Travis Peck said the store is dedicated to the relief effort, ensuring relief organizations are well-supplied and evacuees have a place to go.

“Walmart is opening its stores to the community. We are staying open 24 hours. We want to keep supplies available to people who need them and the organizations leading the relief effort,” he said. “Associates have been cooking breakfast. We've been delivering cots to different locations. We are doing all we can to support the community,”

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