

Earthquake 1989 - San Lorenzo Valley 10-26-89 S. Mercury

Ben Lomond center skips the aid hassle

Locals give locals help, not red tape

By Robin Musitelli
Special to the Mercury News

Gerald Andrews recited a thumbnail sketch of his post-earthquake circumstances.

His Lompico home collapsed in the quake and slid down the hillside. Andrews, who had been sleeping inside, was buried in the rubble, his collarbone broken, his arms punctured with nail holes. Neighbors dug him out.

Andrews still had the clothes on his back, but that's all. He came to the Valley Churches United office in Ben Lomond on Thursday hoping to get food and money for gasoline until he can resume work as a nurse.

While Andrews waited, Valley Churches United Director Annette Marcum wrote a check for \$3,000.

That's the sort of help being dished out to San Lorenzo residents at the all-volunteer center in Ben Lomond. No red tape, no long forms to fill out, no delays. Locals helping locals. "People need cash now," said Marcum, a high-energy, red-haired woman who has been dubbed the San Lorenzo Valley's Mother Teresa. Marcum's philosophy is simple: Government and Red Cross assistance takes too long. Residents can help their neighbors more quickly and with special empathy.

In Ben Lomond, disaster assistance is the biggest business in town.

In addition to cash, volunteers at Valley Churches United dispense certificates for food, sleeping bags and medicine. In another corner of the office, county Human Resources Agency worker Susan Evanoff

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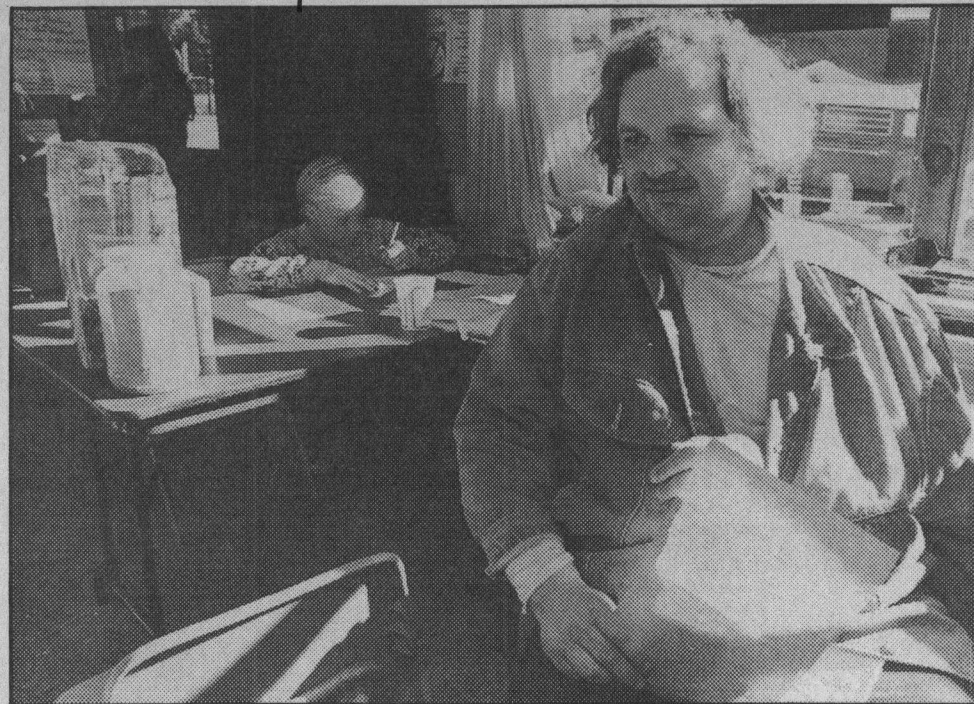
— Valley Churches United
Director Annette Marcum

is making a list of phone numbers where earthquake victims can get more help and information. Boulder Creek resident Mary Hammer, sitting behind Evanoff, is on the phone coordinating volunteers.

Counseling is being given to those with shattered nerves in a separate wing of the building.

When they finish at Valley Churches United, quake victims are routed two doors down where they can shop in a grocery store set up in Park Hall or across the street, where they can use their certificates for sleeping bags, tents, flashlights and other camping gear.

One street over, the Federal Emergency Management Agency office has been set up in a former bank building. Diagonally across the street, the volunteer Ben Lomond Fire Department is housing visiting



Karen T. Borchers — Mercury News

RELIEF — Gerald Andrews seeks assistance at a Ben Lomond relief

center. Last week's quake destroyed his rented home and injured him.

firefighting crews.

Marcum estimates that about 3,000 families have gotten help from Valley Churches United since the earthquake. On Tuesday alone, she wrote checks for \$35,000, not even stopping to balance her checkbook and make sure the money was there. She trusted it would be.

As the money flows out, more donations pour in. A Ben Lomond plumber, Frank Winkler, has turned over money he's gotten for emergency plumbing repairs. Churches have sent thousands of dollars. Food has come from the Second Harvest food bank in Watsonville.

When the earthquake hit, Marcum was in Milwaukee attending funerals for three family members. She flew back to find the volunteer operation in full swing.

"We're the place people knew they could come to volunteer and people knew they could come for help," said Marcum.

Mountain residents made homeless by the earthquake are more inclined to camp

out on their property than to stay in shelters where they cannot take their pets, said Marcum. They need camp stoves, tents and sleeping bags.

What help is given depends on a person or family's circumstances. There are no rules and regulations, qualifying standards or limits on assistance.

Marcum isn't particularly worried about being taken in by a smooth-talking con: "We know who the bums are in the valley."

As she flips through her check stubs, Marcum rattles off stories of need. The money given to Andrews can be used to pay first and last months' rents on a new house so he can leave the CityTeam ministries shelter in Lompico, where he has stayed since being released from the hospital.

The \$3,000 grant was more than Andrews expected. "I thought you were writing a check for \$30," he told Marcum. "I'm just amazed."