

A Big Helping Hand In Soquel

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Sickly Marguerite Wills, 61 years old and a diabetic, received medicine, crutches, clothing and a special thermostatic electric blanket.

Joseann Eppley, 71, has a new home, temporary as it may be, as well as new personal belongings bought with the \$250 given to her.

Daisy Hitesman also has a temporary place to stay and can rest easy knowing her valuables have been retrieved and safely placed in a storage rental.

Thus is the helping hand being provided to storm-ravaged victims in Soquel, who are still trying to recuperate from the Jan. 4 killer storm.

A monumental volunteer effort has been organized with food, clothing and more than \$10,000 collected.

The Volunteer Project Relief Center originated by Sun Properties in downtown Soquel operated without hoopla for more than a week, helping those that needed it most. Many, such as those persons mentioned above, formerly lived at Old Mill or Heart of Soquel mobile home parks, whose coaches literally were ravaged and twisted like tin cans.

Now taken over by the Volunteer Bureau, the relief center's victims are being aided by monies collected by the Soquel Chamber of Commerce-sponsored Soquel Flood Disaster Relief Fund.

Volunteer staff is comprised largely of members of the citizens group Save Soquel, whose name has taken on a whole new meaning.

"When I first walked in, I could see everyone was so busy — they were moving around like bees," explained Wills, who formerly lived at Old Mill. "Yet, they took the time to help me. I was shaking like a leaf because I hadn't taken my diabetes pills."

Medical care has been only one benefit she has received. "They've done so much for me that I could never repay them," said Wills. "All I can do is thank God for them. It's for a reason that they were here."

Added Eppley: "Everybody just extended a hand to help. Without them, I would have been down the creek without a paddle."

Hitesman termed the relief center's workers as a "God-send."

She added, "They helped me so much and they're still at it."

The center, according to Volunteer Bureau coordinator Claire Miller, has received an outpouring of help. She estimated as many as 300 volunteers doing everything from digging mud to helping the some 75 evacuated persons from the mobile home parks.

Just Wednesday, for example, a couple drove up in a new truck, jumped out with shovels in hand and asked where they could help. Both a troop of Brownies and Girl Scouts were busy at the mobile home park and a restaurant in helping with the cleanup.

A truckload of canned foods and clothes, meanwhile, was expected in from Fresno, according to chamber Vice President Dave Tunno. Some \$1,000 from the relief fund was used to help

individuals.

Even the location of the center itself 4835 Soquel Drive in the Soquel Bridge Center — came about through the generosity of others. Owner Frank Barcells donated the office space for a month.

Before that, they were operating out of Sun Properties. Real estate agents John Brissenden and Pat Van Bockern took it upon themselves to get something started.

"People needed housing, they had no money, we were talking about real living issues," said Van Bockern.

"I don't know where they would have gotten this help," she added. "I am still amazed at the support we received."

One place that support wasn't coming from, she was quick to note, was Soquel Supervisor Dan Forbus' office. They finally made contact with Aptos Supervisor Robley Levy's office, Van Bockern explained. It was through that connection that the Volunteer Bureau came into the picture late last week.

Today, work continues at a rapid pace.

According to Miller, separate sections have been organized at the center to coordinate volunteer efforts matching them to requests for help. Others are working on the relocation, temporary housing and other needs for those displaced.

For assistance or if you can help, call 462-3305 or 462-3306.



Jenine Fl and other Troup 1044 Girl Scouts scrub down muddied walls in Soquel.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel