

Earthquake - SLV / Summit Rebuilding

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Valley neighbors quietly rebuilding

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BEN LOMOND — While the media spotlight keeps the damage in Santa Cruz and Watsonville before the eyes of the world, residents of the devastated San Lorenzo Valley are quietly beginning to rebuild.

Hundreds of homes in Boulder Creek, Lompico, Zayante, Ben Lomond and Felton were destroyed or badly damaged by the quake of Oct. 17. Thousands more took moderate damage, and cannot be safely re-occupied without some repair.

Money from state and federal disaster relief agencies could take months to reach those who qualify. Fortunately, people who live in the Santa Cruz Mountains take pride in helping their neighbors.

Local volunteers were distributing food, clothing, camping gear and cash to stricken neighbors long before the state, or even the Red

Cross, had mobilized in the area.

And now that the first stage of the emergency is over, volunteers at the Valley Resource Center, the Volunteer Center and Valley Churches United are helping people make vital repairs so they can move back into their homes.

"We can't help with the major repairs, and rebuilding," said Resource Center director Mary Hammer. "We don't have the resources for that. But we can help with the temporary repairs that will let people move back inside."

While hundreds, possibly thousands of people in the San Lorenzo Valley had to leave their damaged homes, few moved into Red Cross shelters. Many camped on their property because they feared looting, or because they had to care for their animals. Others were simply too proud to ask for help.

But now that the initial shock of the disaster has worn off, "people are starting to come in," Hammer said.

The Valley Resource Center will provide plastic, plywood, bricks and other construction materials, as well as low or no-cost construction help to people who have been unable to get help from state or federal disaster agencies.

"Our priorities are the elderly folks, low-income people and folks with high mortgage payments who have no extra income for rent or rebuilding," Hammer said. "But people have to go to FEMA and the Red Cross before they come here — we simply don't have the resources they do."

Several local contractors have volunteered their time to help with minor repairs, and others have offered their services at a cut rate.

Donations to the construction fund may be sent to Hammer at the Valley Resource Center, 9410 Highway 9, Ben Lomond 95005. Contractors willing to donate their labor, or to work for lowered rates, should contact Hammer at 336-2553.