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Lamorinda shows solidarity with Texas after major disaster

By Nick Marnell



Task force members decontaminating search dogs during Hurricane Harvey search and rescue efforts Photo courtesy CA TF4 and Oakland Fire

Lamorinda public and private entities stepped up to aid the victims of Hurricane Harvey, providing assistance, shipping supplies and collecting donations for the devastated east Texas region, site of the heaviest tropical downpour ever recorded in the continental U.S.

Firefighter Stephen Rogness and engineer David Mazaika from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District joined two captains and three firefighters from the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District as members of the California Task Force 4 Urban Search and Rescue team, trained rescue specialists who departed from Oakland Aug. 26 for the drive to Texas to aid in recovery operations.

"They were initially deployed in San Antonio, but they move around, and their deployment changes by the minute," said Ed Gonzales, ConFire assistant chief of operations. When they arrived in Houston, Gonzales said the firefighters went door-to-door, searching for and evacuating stranded people and pets, and removing hazardous material from the standing water.

On Aug. 30, the task force had been redeployed to Beaumont, Texas, site of continued heavy rain and life-threatening flooding, with residents clambering to their rooftops for safety.

Jay Lifson, executive director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, has plenty of experience in local fundraising for national disasters, which have occurred eerily close to the date of the city's iconic Art and Wine Festival. "In 2001, we collected money for 9/11. Then in 2005, it was Hurricane Katrina, where we collected donations in large pickle jars," said Lifson. Though nothing had been formalized by press time, Lifson said he felt certain the Chamber will accept donations for Harvey victims at the 2017 festival.

The town of Moraga has organized no formal relief effort, according to Amy Cunningham, administrative services director. She recommended that people who want to contribute go through appropriate national disaster relief organizations, like the American Red Cross or the United Way.

City of Orinda Public Information Officer Tonya Gilmore nearly matched Cunningham's words. "If contacted, we would recommend that citizens donate to well-known, reputable relief organizations such as the Red Cross and Catholic Charities," Gilmore said. The city will include information for online donations to the American Red Cross in its weekly online newsletter, the Orinda Outlook.

Volunteers of Be the Star You Are, a 501c3 charity based in Moraga, are shipping books and supplies to shelters in the Texas area and the group expects to continue its Operation Hurricane Harvey Disaster Relief through the end of 2017.



Teens from the Moraga nonprofit "Be The Star You Are" collect books and supplies to send to shelters in Texas as part of its Operation Hurricane Harvey Disaster Relief program. Photo courtesy Cynthia Brian



Along Happy Valley Road last Sunday eighth-grader Alexis Doyle, originally from Houston, Texas, organized a fundraiser to help raise funds for the American Red Cross and Hurricane Harvey victims. Students from left: Sigourney Heaton, Alexis Doyle, Victoria Flint, Isabelle Davis, Sydney Pezman and Tommy Bieker. Photo provided

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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