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Local residents rally in response to North Bay fires

By Cathy Dausman



Brooke Penfold collects items for refugees at the Moraga Country Club Photo Gary Irwin

Krispie treats, etcetera."

As school let out on Friday, they quickly set up a table on Merriewood (just outside of the school where everyone exits, Burks said), and started the sale. "Within 30 minutes, they sold out and raised \$655. It was literally a mob scene with dozens of students and their parents swarming the area, enjoying the treats and making very generous donations.

"It was unbelievable to witness and made me so proud to be part of this special community. These kids did this all on their own," Burks said. "I've never seen a group of kids so energized and committed over the past few days."

Others within Lamorinda found ways to help, reaching out informally to their neighbors and local organizations or working through established nonprofits.

Zahra Hasanian, who is the disaster relief chair for the nonprofit Be the Star You Are, drove to Napa and Solano counties Oct. 12 with volunteer Chelsea Pelchat and Executive Director Cynthia Brian, who is from the Napa County area and whose family and friends have been devastated by the fire, to deliver boxes of books to evacuation centers housing people who fled their homes after recent North Bay fires. "Those affected by the fire have been squatting in these centers for days without any source of entertainment," Hasanian said. "We figured that anyone, young or old, can always enjoy a good book."

Hasanian said she often thinks of herself as helpless against things as arbitrary and ruthless as natural disasters, but her attitude changed with every smile and thank you they received as they handed books to people in person. "We went to several different evacuation centers, and the kindness of the people at all the centers was astounding," she said. "When disaster strikes, it's easy to send prayers, watch the news, or complain about how our world is becoming more and more dismal. It's harder, but also much more rewarding, to send hope as well as concrete help. Hope heals."

If you'd like to donate items through Be the Star You Are, contact Hasanain at (925) 899-4634 or visit <http://www.BetheStarYouAre.org>. They need the following items: masks, diapers, feminine hygiene products, tissues, wipes, sanitizer, towels, books, art supplies, and journals.

Realtor Paddy Kehoe is brokering needs for fire evacuees one family at a time. Working with Orinda's Church of Santa Maria and the Catholic fraternal service Knights of Columbus in Santa Rosa, he hopes to see Lamorinda families adopt stricken Santa Rosa families, especially those living "paycheck to paycheck" to offer relief and meet their basic needs.

"Right now we're hearing the families are just shell shocked," Kehoe said, so plans have not yet been finalized, but he wants to see that donations are family-specific rather than simply sending "truckloads of jackets" to the north. If you can meet the needs of a now-homeless Santa Rosa family, call Kehoe at (925) 878-5869 or email him at paddyrealtor@gmail.com.

Moraga Country Club swim coach Brooke Penfold said many of her friends have "lost their work, home, or both." Penfold said her family and Rohnert Park home are safe, but Sonoma County "is currently in crisis." She is currently collecting supplies for Hidden Valley Satellite School and other Santa Rosa elementary schools. "All donations will go first to the families of students whose school or home was burned down and

While evacuations continued and ashes began to cool in devastated areas of the ferocious North Bay wildfires, the needs for those who had already been displaced were immediate. Food. Shelter. Clothing.

Lamorindans have been stepping up to help.

Last week, four students from Burton Valley Elementary School - fifth-graders Sam Bishop, Hannah Burks, Mollie Scholfield and TK student Malcolm Bellias - planned (on their own) a bake sale for Oct. 13 to raise money for the Sonoma County Resilience Fund in support of the victims of the North Bay fires, according to Lafayette City Council Member Cam Burks.

"They spent the last few days relentlessly campaigning around the school, putting posters up and spreading the word," said Burks, whose daughter Hannah was one of the group. "And ... baking cupcakes, cookies, Rice

the schools receiving displaced students; anything that goes above and beyond that will be brought to evacuation shelters," she said.

Aegis of Moraga General Manager Candice Moses said Moraga is ready to offer shelter for seniors who have been displaced by the firestorm. The Moraga location could easily house 10 to 15 displaced seniors, keeping them "for as long as necessary." The company has even been asked if they have common space available suitable for cots.

"There is so much need," Moses said, "and we've just started this search." She said displaced seniors often arrive with no extra clothing and no personal items. Lamorindans can call Aegis of Moraga at (925) 478-7327 to inquire about helping.

Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, along with six other Bay Area food banks, have deployed resources to affected North Bay areas and issued requests for federal assistance, said Communications Director Lisa Sherrill. The best way to help is to donate directly to food banks in the affected areas, she says. Donations can be made online, with credit, debit cards or PayPal, at <https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/foodbankenews>.

Local Moraga fourth-grader at Camino Pablo Elementary School, Olivia Metz, has launched a nonprofit, Costumes4Kids.org. She is collecting brand new and gently used costumes (sizes 0 to 16) between now and Oct. 22 for a local family shelter and hospital pediatric unit, and hopes to collect over 200 costumes.

In light of the devastating fires and to help spread a little joy to the kids who may have lost everything, Costumes4Kids is planning to also make a delivery to one of the shelters in the North Bay this week. You may bring your costumes to Loard's Ice Cream and Candies (Orinda or Moraga locations), Rheem Theater, Orchard Nursery, or Camino Pablo Elementary, all of which have generously agreed to house the nonprofit's decorated containers.

There are many more throughout Lamorinda demonstrating very generous acts of kindness.

As Burks put it, they are "exercising acute awareness of the enormity of the tragedy and genuinely yearning to help those in need."



Burton Valley students raise money for fire victims Photo provided



Chelsea Pelchat and Zahra Hasanian bring boxes of books to an evacuation center Oct. 12. Photo Cynthia Brian

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