

WILDFIRES

Community distributes kindness in wake of disaster

'Now we can start the rebirth process.'

JOE ANAYA
Wildfire victim

Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Relief

SBC Disaster Relief teams from Oklahoma and several other states, including Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Arizona and California, had a presence at the wildfire scene almost immediately.

Jim Sheetz, incident commander, said 172 sites have been cleaned so far and crews were expected to stay until at least Saturday.

Teams descend on a burn site, separate metals by hand, sift through debris for salvageable items, remove ash and bricks, take out damaged trees and put everything in neat piles.

"We found a wedding ring," said Jerry McCrary of SBC Missouri, which made a homeless woman very happy. "Working with people is the best part."

Headquartered at First Baptist Church in Mannford, dozens of SBC volunteers spent long days at burn sites and returned with dirty but smiling faces.

The Southern Baptist teams haven't been alone. Christian Disaster Relief of Moundridge, Kan., a Mennonite disaster relief group, and Samaritan's Purse of Boone, N.C., whose president is Franklin Graham, have been working with them.

Joe Anaya

On Friday, an SBC disaster team from Arizona cleaned the home site of Joe Anaya on West 61st Street (Pleasantville Road).

"This was like an incineration fire," said Gary Eubanks, who transported many of the excavators, saws and other equipment that rental companies have loaned out for the effort.

Anaya said he feels better now that the cleanup has started. He also lost a home-based business, A&J Lawn Services.

"For us, it's like a death in the family, so it's like a funeral. Now we can start the rebirth process," he said. "I'm so thankful. This has given us a very big head start at rebuilding our lives."

Norma Turner of SBC in Arizona, dug an ashtray from the ashes that Anaya's son, Jorge, made for him when he was in the second grade. She gave it to Anaya, which brought him to tears.

Anaya said that Jorge is now 15 and plays on the Mannford varsity football team and also works with him in his lawn business.

Joe Anaya lived in the home with his wife Lilian and two other children, daughters Kenia and Angelina.

"I'd lose everything in the world, as long as I keep my family," he said. "We put our heart and soul into this house, but the good thing is we still have our heart and soul. This was just the building that housed it."

Some 85 percent of those who lost homes



Volunteers gather in prayer outside the First Baptist Church before driving to wildfire damaged houses in Mannford on Friday. CORY YOUNG/Tulsa World

were not insured. Joe Anaya wasn't one of them, but many of his neighbors were.

Anaya worries that his neighbors won't be able to rebuild.

"We came out Sunday and a lot of our neighbors were living in tents, just wandering around," he said.

In response, Anaya helped organize the Rumble for Relief Event Saturday in which hundreds of motorcycle riders rode through the disaster relief site and donated money to the wildfire relief effort. Several dealerships and businesses hosted the event.

Anaya said it helped him deal with everything he has lost.

"I don't want my neighbors to leave. I want them all to rebuild and come back stronger," he said.

Muscogee (Creek) Nation

When the fires destroyed hundreds of homes and left dozens of schoolchildren homeless less than a week before the first day of school, the Creek Nation stepped in quickly to make sure that no child was without school supplies or a backpack, Mannford Superintendent Steve Waldvogel said.

Donations were so plentiful, they were able to share with the Olive and Drumright school districts.

Town Administrator Mike Nunneley said that the tribe immediately wanted to know what they could do.

The firefighters needed a generator? Done.

"It was just that quick," Nunneley said.



Charles Daub at his temporary residence at a campsite in Brush Creek near the Keystone Dam on Wednesday. His home was destroyed by the recent wildfires. STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers/Town of Mannford

The Corps has allowed fire victims to stay at its campsites at Salt Creek and Brush Creek, where there is access to electricity and running water, along with restroom and shower facilities. Some families are living in tents, and others are housed in campers and recreational vehicles that have been loaned to them.

Others are at the town's New Mannford Ramp.

American Red Cross/Lobeck Taylor Family Foundation

The Lobeck Taylor Family Foundation announced a \$100,000 matching grant to double donations to the American Red Cross. The foundation will match donations dollar for dollar to aid in the relief of the wildfires in Creek and Payne counties as the agency continues to assist families that were left homeless.

"We recognize the great needs of these Oklahoma families in the face of the crippling losses, and we want to help," said Elizabeth Frame Ellison, executive director of the Lobeck Taylor Family Foundation. "We want to help these families rebuild their lives in Oklahoma, and we hope that this matching grant will inspire other foundations, businesses and indi-

supplies.

Temporary homes

Rickey Saliba, owner of Freddie's Steakhouse and Lakeside Cabins, put up two homeless families in cabins.

Chaplin Franklin Kiker of Guardian of Freedom helped connect six families in need with owners of recreational vehicles.

Jennifer Lambert of Sand Springs is loaning her old '76 model, 30-foot recreational vehicle to a single mom and her two home-schooled boys.

"It's not the prettiest thing, but it's a roof over someone's head," she said. "I have three children of my own and if something happened to my home, I hope someone would do what I'm doing."

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Wildfire victim Karen Bradford does a load of laundry in her new washer and dryer donated by Appliance Solutions employees in her new mobile home in Cimarron Mobile Home Park in Mannford on Wednesday. Bradford's home was destroyed in the recent wildfires in the Mannford area. JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World

viduals to step forward, as well."

Appliance Solutions

The employees of Appliance Solutions in Tulsa used their quarterly incentive pay to adopt two single mothers and their children who lost their homes in the wildfires.

They delivered a new washer and dryer on Wednesday to Karen Bradford, who is staying in a temporary residence at Cimarron Mobile Home Park in Mannford.

"She lost everything to the point to where she had to rent a trailer close enough to walk to work," Appliance Solutions owner Dave Bauer said.

Bauer said that the idea actually came from one of their appliance installers. Bauer presented the idea to his 20 employees, and they responded 100 percent in favor of doing it.

"The staff said this is kind of a legacy for us in our own kind of way. They were excited about it," Bauer said.

After they committed to helping Bradford, they got word of another single woman with 12 children who lost her home.

"How do you say no to that?" Bauer said.

Employees loaded a box truck with furniture, cookware and other



Rickey Saliba, owner of Freddie's Steakhouse, in Mannford. CORY YOUNG/Tulsa World

Tulsans safe from wildfire in city limits, officials say

■ The urban area's concrete and short grass play a critical role.

BY PHIL MULKINS
World Staff Writer

Motorists on Interstate 44 crossing the Arkansas River on Aug. 4 felt they were driving into hell as they looked at the towering column of smoke rising from wildfires north of Bristow.

"What if that moves into Tulsa?" they worried.

The sight was spellbinding, taking up half the western horizon. It was much like images seen frequently on national news programs — whole neighborhoods of expensive homes going up in flames in southern California's "wildfire season."

Could Tulsa's neighborhoods be in similar danger someday?

"No way," says Tulsa Deputy Fire Chief Scott Clark, chief of the department's support services division. "The urban environment is broken up by concrete and short grass — two conditions not conducive to wildfire propagation. It is unnerving to see such a large cloud of smoke on the horizon (like on Aug. 4) but we have a huge advantage — a lot of our grass is green, as people water their grass and take care of their properties."

Another question residents may have: Does the Tulsa Fire Department have specific plans to deal with wildfires spreading into housing developments abutting Tulsa's wild lands? These include undeveloped land and creek beds overgrown with trees, many of which died in the December 2007 ice storm and remain there as dry fuel.

"We don't have a contingency plan for that, but we don't have the conditions that are right for a wildfire-type event within the city limits — even if one burned up to the city. Because of our training, the way we're set up and our (building, nuisance and fire) codes, we would stop it at the city limits," Clark said.

The department has 30 fire stations spread out over the city, 25 fire engines, 12 ladder trucks, an authorized firefighter strength of 676 (after TFD's 2011 reorganization) and 1,600 fire hydrants covering "100 percent of the city," Clark said.

In residential areas the hydrants are one-quarter mile apart, but downtown they are a city block apart (375 feet downtown to 625 in central Tulsa). Others in dense, commercially zoned areas are two to three blocks apart (1,250 feet to 1,859 feet). Each pumper truck carries 1,000 feet of 5-inch hose.

Tulsa County has 46 named creeks. In some areas, debris left over from the December 2007 ice storm can be seen from the street, observers point out, still dry and looking susceptible to becoming fire conduits into Tulsa neighborhoods.

"I think the city's stormwater management team has dealt with that, and I'm pretty sure they have removed a lot of the debris left over from the ice storm," Clark said. "They keep the creeks clear of such debris, to facilitate flood control, and keep such debris from stopping up the tin horns and culverts."

In rural areas, wooded areas typically run up close to houses, and you often find debris piled around outbuildings, the deputy fire chief said. "These are your extenders — that's what causes the real issue with wildfires becoming house fires."

In contrast, within the Tulsa city limits, grass is mowed regularly on public rights of way and private residential land, Clark said. Short burning grass is easy to fight, he said.

Roy Teeters, division manager of Tulsa's Stormwater Maintenance Division, said there might be private creeks that developers have incorporated into their additions that still hold ice-storm debris, but Tulsa's 33 main creek basins have been cleared of the debris since summer 2008 and are maintained every year by division personnel using herbicides, chainsaws and heavy-duty grappling equipment.

Its budget is \$15 million annually to keep 80 to 85 personnel busy maintaining Tulsa's flood-control system and keeping its creek beds fire safe. The staff is funded with a stormwater fee that's attached to everyone's utility bill, Teeters said.

The division's function is maintenance of the city owned and maintained creek channels, its detention ponds, roadside ditches and vegetation control and structural repair of those systems (siltation removal, blockage removal and erosion repair). The division also keeps creek basin grass cut at a fire-safe height, he said.

The group officially is not responsible for some small creeks in housing developments but will respond to residents calling about debris even in these private areas, Teeters said. The best way to make such requests is through the Mayor's Action Center at 918-596-2100.

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