

Supervisor Rex Bohn Helps Raise \$7,500 In Lake County Aid

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Donations amounting to \$7,500 will go to the families of Lake County senior citizens, who are still reeling from damage caused by the Mendocino Complex Fire of the past two weeks.

First District Humboldt County Supervisor Rex Bohn organized the donations, which were contributed largely by Humboldt County citizens. The money will be handled and distributed by the Silver Foundation, a local nonprofit that oversees charity for senior citizens. Families of seniors in the area will also receive aid from the funds.

“I was extremely proud to represent Humboldt and all the citizens that donated. Lake County has been hit hard with all the fires these past three years — they’re a distressed community already,” Bohn said Tuesday evening.

Some of the \$7,500 will go toward the foundation’s Meals on Wheels program — catering to seniors who use wheelchairs — and other parts are to be dispersed in the form of gift cards, said Olga Martin Steele, secretary for the Silver Foundation.

Steele was at the Senior Services Center on Monday to collect the check from Bohn — a “phenomenal gesture,” Steele said, since Bohn could have simply mailed the check from Humboldt County instead of making the four-hour drive.

The folks of Humboldt County and Bohn “came through in spades,” wrote Gene Paleno in an email to Olga Martin Steele recounting the Monday moment when Bohn delivered the check.

“The whole time down, I was really proud to be from Humboldt,” he said.

At 92, Paleno, a longtime Lake County author and writer, was floored by how much the people of Humboldt County wanted to contribute.

Steele herself was surprised, she said, given the “donation fatigue” that sets in when more than half a dozen wildfires hit an area in a matter of a few years.

“Here we are, feeling pretty fire-ravaged — and people from district three were coming from places that were burned down not that long ago,” Steele said.

Given the Pawnee Fire in June and the Sonoma County fire last November, it’s been a “triple-whammy” for some Lake County residents, she said.

The Mendocino Complex Fire, comprised of both the Ranch and River fires, had by Monday evening burned 410,182 acres, making it the largest recorded blaze in California's history and far eclipsing the more than 280,000-acre blaze of the December 2017 Thomas Fire. Its cause of the Mendocino Complex Fire is still under investigation. The fires have devastated 280 structures, killing one firefighter and injuring three others. Firefighters had contained 90 percent of the blaze by late Monday.

Third District Lake County Supervisor Jim Steele originally made the case for receiving some help last week in Sacramento at a meeting between rural county representatives across the state—a group that is led by Bohn. Out of all the groups in need, he said, the one most impacted by the devastation was the area's senior citizens.

Many parts of the county took a hard hit from the fire, Steele said, but none more than Lake County's 1st district. The communities of Lower Lake, Hidden Valley and Middletown comprising the district have starkly lower average income levels than the other districts, Steele said. Most of the 1st District's people are "pretty broke" or living "paycheck-to-paycheck," he added.

With less than one term completed, Steele said, he has seen his district encounter nine full emergencies.

"One woman I know has evacuated her property eight times," he said. "She's so traumatized that she doesn't know what to do next. The community is losing property, losing visitorship — and the county's losing our reputation because there's not enough money to change the dynamics of these issues."

On the bright side, Steele said, he's happy the \$7,500 will make a difference in the Lake County community. He praised Bohn's work from Humboldt County and had kind words for Paleno, whose prolific writing, he said, has helped in the push for community needs in the past.

"Jim Steele knows his beans," Paleno wrote to Olga Martin Steele in an email. "He knew, if he told Lake County's story and made it clear we need the money for our fire survivors, people would want to help."

It's a ripple effect, this kind of help, he said — the kind that inspires those in other counties to raise the quality of life for senior citizens. The author of multiple science fiction stories, Paleno riffed a final note on what he considers the "truth" to it all.

"The only thing for what you and I will be remembered when we leave this small blue mudball in space is what we've done for others."

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