

Adversity created a community in Napa County after the wildfires

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One year ago, what began as a surreal and apocalyptic event has transformed into one of the most beautiful journeys in which we as a community observed an abundance of human kindness. A journey in which our community shared its grief and gratitude, and where we learned (once again) we are stronger together.

It underscored what it means to live the Napa County way — dedication to service and a commitment to community.

Just like the earth is adjusting and healing, beginning to nurture new growth in a scarred landscape, we're doing the same. Neighbors are committed to each other; our nonprofits are an integral part of our recovery; our businesses are thriving; and government is adjusting to the new normal.

What began as our county receiving assistance from neighbors, has continued with our residents learning to lean on each other. Firewise Councils, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and Neighborhood Watch Groups have seen a surge in volunteers and support.

Over the years, we have learned many lessons about what it means to be prepared in the face of uncertainty. One of those key lessons was the foresight of the Napa Valley Community Foundation and the Napa Valley Vintners, which kept our community's previous 2014 Earthquake Relief Fund ready for "the next one."

And while wildfires are a completely different beast from earthquakes, the generosity of thousands landed into the hands of our residents who needed it the most.

Organizations such as Rebuild North Bay, Tipping Point, Golden State Finance Authority and Season of Sharing, in addition to the Napa Valley Community Foundation, continue to provide financial support to residents affected by the 2017 Napa Fire Complex.

We're still Napa. And people from around the world want to experience what we have to offer. While tourism and hospitality experienced an initial decrease after the fires, this summer brought a slight increase in visits from near and far. And that means a healthier economy for all of us.

The 2017 fires and the disasters that preceded them demonstrated that the most effective way government can help the community come together is to create flexibility

in governance. To be the one-stop shop that helps you get one step closer toward a better tomorrow, whether it's helping through the rebuilding process; reducing building fees by 30 percent; connecting you with services to assist with the financial burdens of recovery; or providing mental health services post-fire. Recovery is a time, mental and financial commitment. The choices before our residents, who were displaced and/or are currently rebuilding, are endless. Our renewed purpose is to be here for our residents when they are ready.

Our skills as a prepared community for emergencies will continue to grow. The Board of Supervisors remains committed to fostering those connections and bringing in dedicated emergency-preparedness resources. The community is our priority. Personally, it has been a transformative year for me. As the week of Oct. 8 unfolded, my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors and I were committed to delivering important information to residents through countless interviews, personal contacts and press conferences. Every morning, for seven mornings straight, residents tuned in at 9 a.m. to listen to my colleagues and I deliver what must have been the worst news some have ever heard in their lives. Residents felt as though they were having a conversation with their community leaders.

Dozens of times, and to this day, I have been stopped by strangers thanking me for being present, for communicating and for continuing to advocate for our county and region's recovery — expressions of the purest gratitude. I have had many conversations of gratitude with residents and there are many more to be had. I assure you that they are some of the most beautiful conversations that would never have happened but for October 2017.

October 2017 is about so much more than the fires. It's about how we face adversity, how we support one another, and how we truly define a sense of community.

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