

(201)

PALEONTOLOGIST **NILES ELDREDGE**
JEWELRY ARTIST **SCOTT KAY**
NHL ANALYST **PIERRE McGUIRE**

HURRICANE SANDY RELIEF

ALISON TUREN AND OTHER
BERGEN RESIDENTS RALLY
SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE

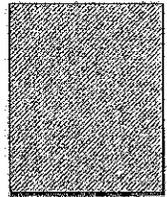


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COMING TOGETHER (Left to right) Nicolas Balakin, Benjamin Esser, Garret Esser and Tyler Turen opened up a lemonade stand to help raise money for the victims of Hurricane Sandy.

Bergen Strong

Residents rally to weather Sandy and its aftermath

WRITTEN BY AMELIA DUGGAN

Before the lights went out on much of Bergen County, residents watched in wonder and sorrow as Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc on the New Jersey coastline. Little did we all know how devastating the impact would be so close to home, as communities like Little Ferry and Moonachie were flooded by the storm surge that ensued. Immediate and dramatic need for shelter and supplies. Downed trees everywhere. Extensive power outages. Gas shortages. Despite the growing issues that prevailed over the two days of the storm and its continuing destruction, the people of Bergen came together to help their neighbors weather the inconceivable damage left behind.

Tough to get Jersey folks down – especially here in Bergen. There was an instant groundswell of helping hands ready to take charge and ameliorate a desperate situation. Weeks have gone by since the storm, but the need persists.

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

Janet Sharma, executive director of the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, points to the paramount need for speedy response in a crisis situation of such magnitude.

"When we are immersed in a disaster," she says, "things change so quickly and there can be so much confusion. It's so fluid, and until things calm down and the power comes on, people can't be sure what they need."

TONY JAWORSKI

"Volunteers are the silver lining in the cloud of disaster"

JANET SHARMA
 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
 VOLUNTEER CENTER OF BERGEN COUNTY



The Volunteer Center serves as a Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, or VOAD.

"After Hurricane Floyd," Sharma says, "Nancy Noth, then executive director of Bergen County's chapter of the American Red Cross, came knocking on the door -- told us we were a VOAD and asked us to get it started and to assign volunteers for a disaster. We are prepared to activate during a disaster and did so last year after Irene and now for Sandy. We have a long-term recovery committee."

While FEMA has been on the scene from the beginning, Sharma says federal resources will not be enough to address the burgeoning need.

"On the state level," she says, "FEMA has had 156,000 people registered and gave out \$67 million -- the nice being about \$39,000 per family, which was clearly insufficient when you examine the need in communities like Little Ferry and Moonachie."

"About 400 families," Sharma says, "were displaced in Little Ferry -- hopefully note a total loss, because they didn't have wind damage. There was significant flood damage as we all know, especially in the basement apartments. Water came in so quickly that residents couldn't get anything out. People had no warning that the storm surge would be as strong as it was or come up as far as it did."

Sharma goes on to describe what she calls "the disaster within the disaster" -- the confusion that whisks around identifying need. That has been the task at hand -- to sort out the need and identify where specifically the next wave of relief should be directed.

"We're securing warehouses so that the abundance of donations can be organized

and distributed over the long haul," she says. "Members from local Rotary clubs have donated warehouses for this purpose, and we now need volunteers to staff them and sort the supplies."

Sharma says the Volunteer Center has seen an overwhelmingly positive response to the request for volunteers and hopes to extend relief efforts even beyond Bergen when opportunity allows.

Sharma thanks the many organizations that have risen to the occasion to offer support -- particularly with the cleanup -- including Islamic Relief, Mormon Helping Hands, Nechama and Samaritan's Purse. Groups of volunteers from those organizations came into the affected communities and thoroughly cleaned impacted homes.

"I also got a call from a gentleman from Williston, S.C., who sent four truckloads of donations with firemen to help distribute," Sharma says. "A pastor in Pennsylvania sent six truckloads of supplies, and a contractor in Wichita with mini Bobcats offered to send them to help with cleanup."

SPRINGING INTO ACTION

Little Ferry's Regina Coyle didn't even pause to blink before she dove headfirst into the crisis in her community. A trustee of St. Margaret of Cortina, a Catholic church that serves both Little Ferry and Moonachie, Coyle knew in a heartbeat that action needed to be taken immediately. Coyle, along with Det. Craig Hartless of the Little Ferry Police Department and its Office of Emergency Management, worked to spearhead rescue and relief operations.

The church opened as a shelter, welcoming more than 175 residents and their pets. But then the church flooded and hurricane victims needed to be relocated -- first to Bergen Tech at Teeterboro, then to Bergen Community College.

"We knew that a pet shelter had to be part of the package," Coyle says, "because many people would not evacuate their homes without their beloved animals. We were doing pretty well until the levy broke,



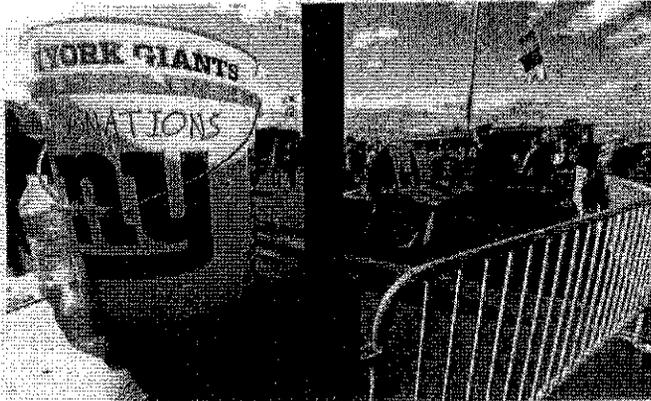
HELPING HANDS (Top to bottom) Matid Amini climbs onto the back of a rescue truck with assistance from Frank Mercadante, 18, of Garfield. Good Samaritan Garfield resident John Mercadante used his personal truck to help evacuate Little Ferry and Moonachie residents after Hurricane Sandy; Stan Gregory of Evansville, Ind., receives a Little Ferry Firefighter T-shirt from Little Ferry firefighter George Muller of Hose Co. 1. Muller heard Gregory drove 14 hours with a truck full of food to help the community of Little Ferry after he learned of the devastation Sandy did to the community. Gregory has been cooking hamburgers, hot dogs and pork chops for the Mehrhof neighborhood, and the location has become a drop-off spot for clothing and cleaning supply donations; Former Little Ferry resident Joe Rubino, Gary Wells of Maywood and Ken Twist help man the grill at 24 Mehrhof Road.

NORTH JERSEY MEDIA GROUP

RANDOM ACTS ADD UP

Wakoff's Lynne Murphy posted this on her Facebook page in early November: "In addition to extensive community outreach to other NY & NJ communities hard hit by Sandy, today (Nov. 8) is 'Bergen Sandy Day' in Wyckoff, a community that's going on Day 9 for many still without power. It's a Random Act of Kindness day. Today, people in this town will be dropping something off at someone's doorstep if they still have a pocketful, reaching out, reaching their community with kindness. Items are simple: a candy bar, a cup of hot coffee, box of donuts, a gerbil, flowers, a pig, etc. Just something to simply say, 'You are not alone.' Grassroots efforts like these make a real difference over the long haul."

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GIANT DONATION A donation bucket for people suffering from the effects of Superstorm Sandy and cystic fibrosis sits on a table near the tailgating area before an NFL football game between the New York Giants and the Pittsburgh Steelers, Sunday, Nov. 4, 2012, in East Rutherford.

REBUILDING NEW JERSEY

How to help with relief efforts after Hurricane Sandy

RED CROSS
 Visit redcross.org/hurricane-sandy, text "REDCROSS" to 90999 or give \$10 or call (800) REDCROSS (732-2672).

NJMS FOUNDATION
 North Jersey Media Group (publisher of *201 Magazine*) has set up a fund to aid local residents who suffered losses due to the storm. Donate at northjersey.com/sandyfund or send checks to NJMS Foundation, P.O. Box 75, Hackensack, NJ 07602.

COMPASSION FUND AT BERGEN COUNTY UNITED WAY
 Visit bergencountyway.org or donate by mail to Bergen County United Way, 4 Routes Ave., Paramus, NJ 07652.

UNITED WAY
 Visit USUnitedWay.org to donate to the *How I Survived Sandy Recovery Fund*. You can also text RECOVERY to 3-000 to make a \$10 donation.

COMMUNITY FOOD BANK OF NEW JERSEY
 Visit foodbank.org, text PERDNJ to 30686 or give \$10 or call (908) 355-3443 ext. 243.

HURRICANE SANDY RECOVERY FUND
 Set up by the Christie Administration and chaired by First Lady Nancy Bar Chastie. People can donate money to storm victims online at sandyrelief.org or make a donation through mail to Hurricane Sandy New Jersey Relief Fund, P.O. Box 95, Merchant, NJ 07245-0095.

For a comprehensive list of relief efforts, visit bergen.com/sandyrelief.

then we had to shuffle people from place to place to keep them safe and warm."

Like Sharma, Coyle thanks the unsung heroes who have come to her community's aid.

"People from Michigan, Indiana, Syracuse and Buffalo, Georgia and Canada all came to help," she says. "Members of a local gym club walked from Saddle Brook to help us clean up. The National Guard is also here, and they have been wonderful."

"FACING" THE CHALLENGE

Social media, including Facebook, proved important tools for organizing relief efforts in the shattered communities.

"We put a call out for supplies," Coyle says, "for diapers, canned goods and the like. People came out of the woodwork just to help our community restore their lives. Whole groups of people all around the country have given from their hearts — time, talent and interest — helping with the cleanup process and restoration work. It is very moving."

Among the biggest losses in Little Ferry and Moonachie were automobiles.

"We lost all of our cars," Coyle says. "People who need their cars to get to work have no work — no jobs as a result, but they are staying strong."

To direct your relief contributions to the people of Little Ferry and Moonachie, please contact the Volunteer Center of Bergen County.

Coyle points to a favorite quotation from humorist Erma Bombeck, who once said, "When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me.'"

To Coyle, those are words to live by.

A TRUE SENSE OF COMPASSION

Residents should also know about Bergen County United Way's Compassion Fund, which is designed specifically to help people in dire need.

Tom Toronto, executive director of Bergen County United Way, says the organization's statewide helpline, 211, has been providing much needed information and directing callers to appropriate resources for help.

"We're examining next steps for our United Way," he says. "Once we get past the people with power and get families into safe shelter, we move to examine how we can provide relief. The Compassion Fund is fast and flexible. It is beyond what FEMA and the Red Cross do."

Toronto says funds can be used to purchase hot water heaters, washers and dryers, gift cards for food, cleaning supplies — even wall board if necessary.

"Right now, people are still scattered and things have been a bit chaotic," he says. "We needed to get a tractor trailer for St. Margaret's in Little Ferry so that the church could resume holding services."

Toronto says United Way is also trying to do outreach to individuals to help them — people who have their recovery plans in place and just need the last piece of the puzzle.

"These communities have been really slammed," he says, "and the relief efforts have to be sustained over time. It will take weeks, months and even years to rebuild. We need to continue to raise funds to support these ongoing efforts."

"What's neat about these communities is that they are tight knit," he says. "There is a sense of trust among the residents, and that goes a long way. Volunteers like

Regina Coyle and Craig Hartless help to identify people who might otherwise be left behind."

Toronto says the response has been high, with significant contributions coming from existing and new donors.

"Understand that it's no pity party for these people in Little Ferry, Moonachie and Carlstadt," he says. "They are hardworking people who never want or expect anything — lots of stoicism down there. People like Regina really help."

Toronto stresses the importance of giving money and gift cards, because of the dignity factor.

"The ability to buy the stuff they need for their families gives people a greater sense of dignity," he says. "In addition, many mom-and-pop businesses have been destroyed, and giving money helps put resources back into the local economy and helps it get back on its feet."



TOM TORONTO

GIANTS AP PHOTO; TORONTO: NORTH JERSEY MEDIA GROUP

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

TUREN: TAY FINNIZIAN; COLDWELL: COURTESY OF PAVLUS LASSER



EVERY LITTLE BIT Alison Turen started gathering donations when she realized how hard Sandy had hit New Jersey and New York.

ALISON TUREN STEPS UP AGAINST SANDY

Donations form a large square on the living room floor of Alison Turen's Bergen home. Cardboard boxes of pasta and shopping bags filled with stuffed animals stand amid two dozen mesh bags overflowing with new and used clothing. Everything was donated by friends and strangers alike who heard Alison was collecting items to help victims of Superstorm Sandy.

"And that's just the fifth or sixth batch," Alison says. Sandy's devastating sweep through the New York metro area left millions without power, thousands homeless and more than 800 dead. After the storm, which Alison and her family — her husband, Scott, and their two sons — had ridden out in the basement, much of Bergen County lay in tatters. A falling tree had knocked power lines onto their front lawn, causing a fire and effectively blocking them in for days.

But the Turens were lucky: Their home remained in tact, a generator kept the lights running and their cell phones allowed them sporadic access to the outside world. They took in a friend and her baby, and resolved to wait until life returned to normal. That is, until Scott brought home a TV antenna on the Friday after the storm and Alison turned on the news.

"I couldn't believe what I saw," she says. "I couldn't believe the devastation. I didn't know what to do with myself."

The answer presented itself online. As she tentatively scrolled donations on Facebook and elsewhere, help poured in. Friends, family and neighbors lined up to donate clothing and money. And Alison friend Jon Maxfield, a Bergen resident, a reporter for WABC-TV and a board member with the Center for Food Action, helped spread the word. The center was concerned about being able to provide food for displaced residents, so Alison and Maxfield included a plea for food, as well.

And that was that.

"I can't even tell you the number of things that are being donated," Alison says. People have donated everything from baby clothes and furniture. Someone gave Alison a suit for one family's son, who couldn't even go to work because he had lost everything. One donor dropped off brand-new bedding from Target, while another insisted on buying piles of new toys. And one friend raised a baby's sum from tailgates at MetLife Stadium before the Giants-Steelers game on Sunday, Nov. 4.

"I was speechless," Alison says, "beyond all belief."

Many of the donations have gone to Temple Sinai in Tenafly, which is helping families in the hardest-hit areas of Bergen, mainly Little Ferry and Moonachie, where several feet of storm surge gusted people's homes. Alison also has given to one particular family in Little Ferry who lost absolutely everything in the storm, and another in a similar situation on Long Island.

More than anything, Alison has been inspired by Bergen residents' generosity of spirit — and that her 4- and 6-year-old sons have witnessed it firsthand. In fact, her older son was inspired to donate the \$7 he had earned doing chores.

"It's just people helping people," she says. "Anyone's town could have been the worst town affected. It was such an unbelievable thing that is now our reality. Anything could happen in these crazy storms."

But now Alison knows how she and countless others in Bergen will respond if another crisis like Sandy should arrive.

"As long as people need it," she says, "I'll keep doing this. This has kind of taken over my life. In a good way!" she adds with a laugh.

— RYAN GREENE



BANDING TOGETHER A team from Coldwell Banker in Wyckoff collected truckloads of supplies for needy families.

ANSWERING THE CALL

Pavlus Lasser (third from right), a Realtor with Coldwell Banker in Wyckoff, rallied friends and colleagues to collect donations for hurricane victims throughout the region.

"My office really stepped up," Lasser says, "and we approached people in Wyckoff as well as surrounding towns and called for donations of badly needed supplies and food for victims in Staten Island, the Jersey Shore and local Bergen communities, which were really devastated. Our office was filled in one day and a local church donated a large meeting area to our staff."

On Nov. 7, the group filled a 24-foot-long truck with a portion of the donations and sent it off to Staten Island. Other vehicles took supplies, as well.

In addition to collecting donations for families who were victims of Sandy, Lasser worked to help pets displaced by the storm.

"Many families were considerate enough to send food for displaced dogs and cats," she says, "and I managed to reroute those things to a very active local rescue group called The Last Resort. They do wonderful things and had just raised \$10,000 they were designating to the humane victims of Hurricane Sandy."

Lasser says representatives from the organization drove around the disaster areas picking up any strays they could find and visited shelters offering to take stray dogs for families that may be able to stay with friends and relatives but whose pets are not welcome.

The Last Resort is offering to take the dogs with families and place them either in their facility or with volunteers, Lasser says. "They have even offered to pay for boarding some of them."

— AMELIA DUGGAN