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Fire relief funds still available to help

By Pat Hampton

Tribune Publisher

Inundated by hundreds of victims of the Tubbs Fire in the days immediately following the Oct. 8 firestorm, non-profits like the Upvalley Family Centers of St. Helena and Calistoga are still actively serving families and giving out aid to victims, says executive director Jenny Ocon.

Most are seeking financial aid to secure new housing, subsidize lost wages or replace per-

sonal and household items burned in the blaze, she said in an interview with the Tribune this week.

Among the millions of dollars donated and being dispersed by several valley charities, is \$324,000 raised through donations to the Calistoga Firefighters Association during its annual Bingo & Raffle Night last November.

Ocon said her agency, tasked by firefighters to process applications for financial help and to interview and determine which requests meet

the firefighters' criteria for giving money, has allocated about half of the funds to 302 local families. The only guideline given by firefighters for dispersment of funds is that the person or family receiving help lives in the 94515 zip code, which straddles both Napa and Sonoma county boundaries said association president Jason Tamagni.

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"There are no income limits, only that help goes to people in the 94515 area, which is basically the school district," Tamagni said.

The amount given during the fundraiser included \$100,000 donated by Bald Mountain and Alcion Ventures, developers of the Silver Rose property; Up to \$50,000 in matching funds from the Calistoga Hills resort; \$50,000 matching donation from the City of Calistoga's general fund to cover the 10 percent administrative fee for case managers and their support services; and \$10,000 from the city's law firm of Burke, Williamson & Sorenson, LLP.



Jenny Ocon

also being distributed by the UpValley Family Centers.

Ocon is the first executive director for UpValley Family Centers, and has been with the agency since January 2014. She said the average per-household grant given so far has been \$1,000.

The family center met with the firefighters in December but did not start dispersing funds until

January. Money raised through the Napa Valley Community Foundation, Rotary District 5130 and the Napa Valley Vintners is

January.

The agency says it can do more to get the word out about the funding available, although it has posted flyers in apartment buildings, used social media, sent out letters, blasted e-mails and has funding application information on its website, upvalleyfamilycenters.org.

People are still coming through the door she said, some are new — "they've just found out about it" — and some are "people who have to come back." Eighty percent of requests are for housing needs, Ocon said. Funds can help pay back rent or mortgage, a security deposit or first and last month's rent.

Two full-time and two part-time case managers are tasked with processing applications for all of the

funds, Ocon said. Case managers sit down with applicants to review and assess need, she said. "Sometimes there's a really big need because they've lost everything." There may be reduced work hours or transportation needs.

"Different funders have different restrictions," Ocon said. "Our job is to use the money appropriately to the donor restrictions; appropriate to the need in the case." Ocon said her agency is dealing with funds from over a dozen different donors.

UpValley Family Centers has a year-long agreement with the Calistoga Firefighters Association. Any funds not spent by Dec. 18 will be refunded to the firefighters, although both groups will sit down in June to review the contract.

The Tubbs Fire, which struck near 10 p.m. on a warm, windy Sunday night last fall, was one of more than a dozen large fires that broke out and were burning simultaneously in eight Northern California counties. By the time it was contained on Oct. 31, the fire, which started near Bennett Lane and Highway 128 in Calistoga, had quickly spread over the hills to Santa Rosa, and was estimated to have burned 36,807 acres and killed at least 22 people.

In the Tubbs Fire, 40 residential buildings and 45 outbuildings were destroyed within the Napa County 94515 zip code area, wrote Nelson Cortez, assistant to the Napa County Board of Supervisors, in an email sent to Calistoga mayor Chris Canning.