

Appeal Tribune

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PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK



CEASING PUBLICATION

This is the last issue of The Appeal Tribune in Silvertown. Any remaining balance on subscribers' accounts will be refunded via check within six weeks. Thank you for your support of this newspaper.

Triumphs & struggles

Wildfire recovery group brings survivors together as community rebuilds

Capi Lynn
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Diana McGuire announces she recently moved into her newly constructed home, needing only the dishwasher to be installed before the final inspection.

But the reassuring smiles and covert fist-pumping around the table quickly turn into nervous scowls and discernable fist-clenching.

Ann Amundsen and Mike Roantree, just a mile up North Fork Road from McGuire, report they have yet to be issued a permit to rebuild on their property.

The see-saw of emotions for wildfire survivors in the Santiam Canyon continues, even two years later. Many have struggled not just with rebuilding their homes but their lives.

"It's been a long road for a lot of us," Cindy Barnes said during a recent meeting of the weekly support group.

She and her husband, Mike, are in their new house despite needing to change plans multiple times because of obstacles along the way. They still have out-buildings destroyed in the wildfires to replace.

Members of the group can relate to the frustrations, whether because of insurance company battles, building permit delays, construction labor shortages or building material price spikes. Often-times, it has been of all the above.

The support they have gained and the relationships they have formed have helped lessen the burden and aid the healing process.

None of them knew each other before the wildfires, even though nearly half live along North Fork Road SE, which was hit hard.

The group was launched in April 2021. Members gather every Monday evening in a modular building on a Stayton church's property for a safe space to be angry and vent or sad and cry.

They have all suffered trauma, having been forced to flee their homes on Labor Day 2020, when the deadly and destructive Beachie Creek and Lionshead wildfires whipped through the canyon. Five people died and more than 1,500 structures were destroyed, including 700 homes.

Others were injured, such as Kathleen Becherer, who along with her husband, Bruce Bailey, is a regular member of the group. She suffered severe burns trying to save their goats and spent more than a month at the state's only burn center in Portland.

For some, the worst was yet to come. McGuire's husband died from an aneurysm four months after the wildfires. Suzanna Mack's daughter died less than a year after. Her husband also suffered a heart attack.

Mack's family lost three homes and 40 acres of trees in the fires, and she remains angry that none of the residents received evacuation notices. One of the homes was the rental where Angela Mosso and Chris Toftel lived with their son Wyatt and her mother, Peggy Mosso. Wyatt and Peggy died in the fires.

"We're just living on anger and despair," Mack said. "This does help, having somebody to talk to who has experienced the same thing. I would be nuts without them."

Some have counselors or therapists they meet with one-on-one. They have watched neighbors move away because the stress was unbearable. For sale signs are everywhere on North Fork Road.

Deciding whether to stay or go

Brandon and Rechelle Kirk are rebuilding their home about 15 miles up North Fork. They are in their 30s and among the youngest members of the group. They have temporary occupancy and seemed excited to share with the group that a mason has begun the rock work on the house.

Still, they lament losing two years of their lives navigating the insurance and county systems and spending more on fire-hardening materials such as steel siding and a metal roof.

Brandon admits he wouldn't do it again. Al and Laurie Brooks originally planned to put a pre-fabricated house on their property between Gates and Detroit. They jumped through all the hoops to clear the charred land of debris, then the state's contractor doing the work was fired.

While Al looked forward to watching the regrowth in the coming years, Laurie just couldn't bear the blank slate.

"Every time I went back to the site, all I could feel was, this isn't where I lived," she said. "It just wasn't. The house was missing and the trees."

Last winter, with work on their property at a standstill, they changed their mind about rebuilding. But they didn't want to leave the canyon, so they used their insurance money to buy a house in Mill City.

"As I look at some of this stuff people are going through with their permits, we're that much more happy we didn't go ahead and rebuild," Al Brooks said.

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A sad farewell

The Silvertown Appeal Tribune publishes its final issue

Capi Lynn | Salem Statesman Journal

The Silvertown Appeal Tribune has deep roots in its community. The weekly newspaper has been published for more than 140 years and delivered to generations of townspeople. ● But today, we say a sad farewell to the publication and its loyal readers. ● Sept. 14, 2022, is the final issue.

Gannett, which has owned the Appeal Tribune since 1990, made the difficult decision to suspend the publication of select weekly print publications across its nationwide network. The move is part of the company's ongoing digital transformation.

The Statesman Journal, also part of the Gannett, remains committed to covering communities surrounding the Salem area in both its digital and print products.

142 years of history

Gannett and the Statesman Journal share only part of the Appeal Tribune's roots.

Gannett purchased the paper 32 years ago as part of the bankrupt North Santiam Publishing company, which included The Stayton Mail. The group was renamed East Valley Newspapers and for years operated under the Statesman Journal umbrella. The Mail also is ceasing publication Sept. 14.

The Appeal was Silvertown's first newspaper, started in 1880 by Henry G. Guild, who was referred to in an early history summary of Oregon newspapers as a "journalistic pioneer." A nearly pristine first issue, dated May 17, 1880, can be seen at the Silvertown Country Historical Society.

Homer Davenport, the renowned cartoonist who grew up in Silvertown, had strong ties with Guild and the Appeal during his youth. He spoke fondly of both in his autobiographical work, "The Country Boy." Davenport called Guild "the best editor the Silvertown Appeal ever had" and said Guild often traded cordwood for subscriptions.

After a string of other editors and publish-

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Bound volumes of the Silvertown Appeal Tribune by year are kept in the temperature-controlled basement of the Silvertown Country Historical Society museum. CAPI LYNN / STATESMAN JOURNAL

No answers

2 years later, investigations of 10 Labor Day fires remain unfinished

Zach Urness
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Gates mayor Ron Carmickle wants somebody to take responsibility.

Wildfire survivor Brandon Kirk is baffled by the delay. Bruce Bailey, who lost his home and whose wife spent a month at the Legacy burn center, believes that without a clear accounting of what happened, it will happen again.

Two years ago, on Labor Day evening, wildfires exploded across Oregon and brought a level of destruction never before witnessed in the state. Nine people were killed, including five in the Santiam Canyon, and



Images from Gates School and the former Beachie Creek Fire incident command post that was burned and forced to evacuate after new fires started on downed power lines. ANDY ADKINS / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

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