

Blanket and Quilt Donations Warm the Heart

By Scott Laird



At times there's not much better than a blanket or a quilt to help make someone feel safe and warm. Vernonia residents were lucky enough to receive some of both in the aftermath of the Flood of 2007.

The ladies of the Community of Christ Church in Portland donated handmade quilts they were making to the victims of the flooding, hoping to offer comfort and warmth to those in need.

Sixth grade students at Hillsboro's Butternut Creek School also decided to send some warmth and help to citizens affected by the flood. About seventy students worked for two and a half afternoons making fringed fleece blankets to help with the relief effort. Teacher Randy Bither and parents brought students to Vernonia on Saturday December 22 to present twenty-nine blankets, baby blankets and scarves to Mayor Sally Harrison at City Hall. Mayor Harrison thanked the students for their kindness and told them the blankets would be put to good use by Vernonia residents in need.

Bither said his students came up with the idea of making blankets while talking about the flood during a current events discussion. Two years ago students had done a similar project for the homeless. When asked what they might do to help Vernonia, the students suggested making blankets. "The kids raised some money through donations to get things started. My hope is that the students see they can actually make a difference. I also hope they can learn about paying it forward, to reach out and help others."



One student, Marissa Turner, aged twelve, explained why she thought it was important to help, "I knew the people here were having a hard time. I knew if I was them, I would want

someone to help me, to do something nice for me." Another student, Alex Sanderson, aged 11, said she was concerned about what people in Vernonia had lost. "I saw on TV that people had lost their food and supplies, even their dog. I thought helping them out would be nice."

The students got to hear first hand about the day of the flood from some local residents, and learned about disaster relief from a FEMA representative, before heading out for a short tour of the city to see for themselves some of the areas that were flooded.

Tzu Chi – Joy In Giving

By Scott Laird

The Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation began working in Vernonia, as soon as the roads were reopened, bringing donations of blankets hats, scarves and supplies. According to spokesman Ken Wu the group came to Vernonia to offer support and love. "Tzu Chi means 'kind offering'," said Wu. "It's about helping and serving with compassion."

Tzu Chi is a non-governmental humanitarian organization that is guided by the four Buddhist principles of kindness, compassion, joy and giving. It is a volunteer led organization that strives to ease suffering. The group can be found in thirty-eight countries world-wide and has fifty offices in the United States, including one in Beaverton.

According to Wu, Tzu Chi has a four part mission: giving charitable, medical, cultural and educational services. As part of their charitable service the group offers international relief through humanitarian aid. "We want to help with urgent needs," explained Wu. "We want to give help with cash that will go directly to meet needs. We don't want to give someone a shirt that doesn't fit; we give them money so they can buy what is needed."

To that end the Tzu Chi foundation arranged to come to Vernonia on December 22. Two-hundred citizens who had been affected by the flood and identified by the unmet needs committee as most needy were contacted ahead of time and told to come to the Community Learning Center for grant assistance. "It was all a little mysterious," said one citizen while waiting in line. "They wouldn't



really say what it was about." After a short interview and some paper work, each family was given a \$200 cash card to use as they needed. That was a total of \$40,000 donated to flood victims.

In a letter that was given to each recipient, Tzu Chi founder and master Shih Cheng Yen states "At this critical time, Tzu Chi people all over the world wish to extend their warmest and most sincere support and encouragement to you. We hope what we bring you will not only meet your most urgent needs, but also be a source or great comfort and strength." The letter concludes, "We pray that you will soon return to your feet, continue to lead a life of bright and promising future, and pass on this love to others in need."

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