



Shane Guth, left, of Big R Oregon in Redmond, helps unload a truck of donated items from the store, passing them down to volunteer Miles Tripp.

Relief in the face of fire

Story and photos by **GEORGE PAVEN** • *East Oregonian*

Donations pour into relief center for victims of wildfire

Judy Dunn was in Michigan when she heard about the ferocious wildfire bearing down on her home along Canyon Creek south of John Day.

Miraculously, the blaze missed Dunn's house — inherited from her late father — by mere inches, though others weren't as lucky. At least 39 homes have been destroyed in the Canyon Creek Complex fire, leaving families with nothing but a pile of rubble and questions where to turn next.

Stories of tragedy have led to donations pouring in from across the state as Oregonians dig deep for ways to help. The result is a massive relief effort now organized at the Grant County Fairgrounds Pavilion, which volunteers have transformed into a kind of one-stop shop for fire victims to get back on their feet.

Shelves are carefully stocked with everything from macaroni and toothpaste to dog food and pillows. There are extension cords, lamps, books, dishes, water, toasters, paper towels, bug spray and more donated clothes than can possibly fit in one location.

Though the fire spared Dunn's house, it did destroy an outbuilding and pump house that left her without running water and electricity. She and her husband, Jim, are staying at a friend's place in Canyon City until they can rebuild.

On Saturday, Judy Dunn and her friend, Lena Redheffer, stopped by the Fairgrounds Relief Center to pick up just a few odds and ends.

"This is just beyond anything I can imagine," Dunn said. "This is amazing, the effort of everybody who's come together."

Dunn said the community has always managed to pull together during hard times, but the Canyon Creek Complex fire was unlike anything she's ever experienced.

"Canyon Creek going up looks like a bomb went off," she said. "Our hearts just go out to the people who lost everything."

Beyond Grant County, good Samaritans have loaded their cars, trucks and horse trailers with donated goods driven down from Pendleton, Portland, Bend and even as far as Boise. A truck rolled in Saturday from Big R Oregon out of Redmond, carrying pallets of donated horse tack, feed, hoses and even a chainsaw.

Mike and Hilda Allison made the 70-mile drive from Hines with a special delivery of food and water. The couple used to own a logging business together, and still know plenty of locals



Mike Allison, of Hines, arrived Saturday with a truckload of donated food and water for fire victims at the Fairgrounds Relief Center



Jennifer Mooney, a volunteer at the Fairgrounds Relief Center, stocks toothpaste and other essentials for victims affected by the Canyon Creek Complex fire.

in the John Day area.

"We woke up this morning, and Mike said, 'Let's go do some good things,'" Hilda Allison said. "It's amazing how these small communities rally."

Volunteers help unload and find shelf space for all the new items, while behind the scenes another group of volunteers updates a 10-page list of businesses and individuals offering services such as health, housing and financial assistance.

Jennifer Mooney said it is impossible to know exactly how much has been donated so far. Items keep coming in every day, more than they could ever give away.

"All this is love for the ones who need it," Mooney said. "It's pretty awesome."

Mooney, a retired justice court clerk in Canyon City, has worked at the Fairgrounds Relief Center since it opened Saturday, Aug. 15 at the peak of the fire's intensity. Her job is to greet families at the door, make sure they sign in and help them figure out what it is they'll need to take with them.

"Most of them are so numb, they can't think," she said. "So we think for them, and try to pick out the things they'll need."

Mooney said she has no idea how people think to donate the things they bring in — things as simple as finger-

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— **Jennifer Mooney**, volunteer at Fairgrounds Relief Center

nail clippers that are so basic they're easy to overlook.

There are bigger things too, like furniture, beds and a spare generator. It's all needed, and all going to good use, Mooney said.

The relief center keeps an updated list of things victims need on its Facebook page, which is now followed by 676 people. Anything that's extra or left over the center hopes to keep in the community.

Mooney said they plan to keep taking donations until the need is no longer there.

"We've done this out of love," she said. "We're all helpers, and we want to help."

Dunn still tears up when she thinks about everything that's happened the past week, and especially how her husband's childhood memories have essentially gone up in flames. They might be in limbo now, she said, but they will rebuild. And they will make it better.

"It's just going to take time," Dunn said. "It's been a roller coaster."

To reach the Fairgrounds Relief Center, call 541-575-1900.

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