

Fire

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for the new blankets, quilts and clothing, plus 56 \$100 Visa gift cards they distributed on behalf of Grant County residents.

"We found people sifting through what was left of their houses," Courtney said.

"Some people were very distraught — a lot of tears on both sides," Dean said, adding they also found three families with Grant County connections.

Courtney said it felt great to give people something that didn't require paperwork or a long wait time.

"We want to give a special thanks to everyone who helped pull this together and make this event possible," she added. "We're so grateful for all the monetary donations and items and time spent helping organize."

Megan CATERON

Megan CATERON and her father, Wayne CATERON, were rummaging through piles of ash where their home once stood in Paradise when they noticed a truck drive past.

Megan, 34, said she thought it was likely workers involved with the cleanup, but then she looked up and saw the Foxes walking toward her.

"They introduced themselves to us, and immediately I felt this heartfelt rush," she said. "We started talking to them, and in a matter of minutes it felt like we'd known each other for years."



Contributed photo

Courtney Fox of Canyon City, left, and her daughter Brooke, right, help kindergartner Rachel assemble a toy she received for Christmas. Rachel's school, the Paradise Adventist Academy in Paradise, California, was destroyed in November by the Camp Fire.

Megan said the Foxes gave them some gift cards and blankets. She gave one quilt, made by ladies of the John Day Seventh-day Adventist Church, to a friend's daughter, and the gift is well-loved.

Megan first heard the sirens at 6:30 a.m. Nov. 8 as she left her home for work at the Feather River Hospital where she was an oncology pharmacy physician.

"Within 30 minutes, I noticed new smoke right behind the hospital," she said. "It spread pretty quick."

Five minutes later they

were told to evacuate.

"It reminded me of a movie — total chaos, everyone was running," she said.

Megan visited with her dad for a moment at home, and he stayed behind. She picked up her dog from a doggie daycare and was stuck in traffic for about 1 1/2 hours on her way out.

She knew her dad wouldn't leave home until he saw the house burning with his own eyes.

"The sky was on fire, people's yards were on fire," she said. "I could hear propane tanks exploding. ... McDon-

ald's was on fire, cars were driving on the bike path."

An eerie sight was the school's newest bus in the ditch. She said her dad, who is in his late 60s, helped a dozen residents of the senior mobile home park near their home to the safety of a Kmart parking lot.

Wayne lost fishing gear, including old wooden lures that once belonged to his father.

In years past, Wayne spent time in Grant County fishing and hunting.

Now Megan and her dad live 10 feet from each other in travel trailers, staying at an almond orchard owned by a family friend in Gridley.

The damaged hospital closed, and she said everyone who worked there will be terminated Feb. 5.

While Megan said she feels "lost," she is grateful to be in contact with family, and she'll soon start nursing school.

"I can restart," she said.

Monte Nystrom

Paradise Adventist School Principal Monte Nystrom noticed "a different look to the sky" at 7:15 a.m. Nov. 8 on his way to work.

At 7:30, as parents arrived with students, he asked them to stay in their car and head out, after learning the fire had reached a nearby town.

Nystrom made his way to the other side of town to pick up his paraplegic sister and his mother-in-law at a retirement center near the hospital — the fire burning about 50 yards away. An officer asked him to take as many other residents as he could, so three more people joined them, and as they drove past the Feather River Hospital, he also offered a ride to a nurse who was walking by



Contributed photo

These are just two of the many businesses in Paradise, California, destroyed by fire.

with her face covered.

He said it was raining embers, which he would stop to stomp out, until it became too smoky. He said it took about three hours for a drive that normally would have taken 10 minutes.

"There was a fair amount of time that I was 99 percent sure that we weren't going to make it with high winds blowing the fire," he said. "When we did get out, it did feel miraculous."

Nystrom's wife, who was on the other side of town, also reached safety, but their home burned, and they now live in a motor home parked at a friend's home. Most of the staff and 166 students' families also had their homes destroyed, but all survived.

A few classrooms were destroyed, so the remainder of their school year is being held in a church on the same campus as the Chico Oaks Adventist School until module classrooms arrive.

The Foxes visited the school and, after handing out Christmas gifts, gave several Visa cards to Nystrom to distribute. One recipient was a mother who not only lost her uninsured home but was also in a serious wreck when her car was rear-ended on the freeway.

"I was able to give her several gift cards, and she was just so grateful," Nystrom said. "We appreciated the gifts they brought and, even more than that, was the love and compassion that they exuded while they were here."

Dave Vixie

Teacher Dave Vixie was at his Paradise property on Jan. 10, waiting to speak with a work crew about hauling away debris, the remains of his house.

"I'm standing in the middle of ashes, like mud, like the ash of Pompeii," he said.

Dave said he and his wife, Karen, were in the last vehicles heading out of town. They hauled their eight mules in two trailers, and one of the trailers, designed for four mules, had six packed inside.

Dave, who teaches seventh and eighth grades at Paradise Adventist Church, lost almost everything, including old wagons and carts.

His interest in history, especially the explorers of

the West, ties him to Canyon City. He is friends with Jim and Mary Jensen who own the Oxbow Trade Company where they sell and repair wagons, wagon wheels and carts.

Taking students on trail rides, for living history journeys, is a favorite pastime for Dave, and last summer he brought a group of students to John Day in a motorized vehicle to witness the total solar eclipse.

After the Camp Fire burned their home, Vixie met the Foxes while transporting two of their mules during the Thanksgiving break. The Vixies had planned a stop at the Oxbow Trade Company to pick up a repaired wagon wheel, and they ended up staying with the Foxes. Both families shared stories of the fires they experienced.

When the Foxes came to the school in Chico, Dave said he was especially impressed with Brooke, Courtney's 10-year-old daughter, who helped distribute Christmas gifts to 10 kindergartners.

Dave said, when Brooke went through the Canyon Creek Complex fire, not all her classmates understood what she was going through.

"Brooke understood these kids' experience," Dave said. "It was a neat interaction."

Dave described a class assignment, where geometry students were drawing pictures with shapes on a white board. One boy drew a detailed picture of his house, then quickly erased it.

"All gone," he said, then added another doodle — "All gone, except these tennis shoes."

In a recent history lesson, Dave said they learned about the spread of Christianity in 300 AD and that one of the attractions was creating a community where people took care of each other.

"As they read that, I said, 'Does any of this sound familiar to you?'" he said, and responses included, "That's exactly what happened to us."

"I wanted to say thank you to the communities of John Day and Canyon City for reaching out with kindness and compassion to lift the lives and courage of others," he said. "This time it was Butte County, California."

Our Camp Fire Relief Benefit Sale raised a grand total of \$5600.00 along with a truck load of new items we were able to deliver to the victims!

Thank you Grant County for being so generous and helping pay it forward! Special thanks to everyone who helped pull this together and make the event possible!

We are so grateful for all the monetary donations, items and time spent helping organize! Thank you everyone! And a very special thank you to the following people.

Don & Jennifer Skipper-Mooney
Terry Justen-Griffith
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Mindy Winegar
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*Sincerely,
Dean & Courtney Fox*

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