

LEE'S SUMMIT JOURNAL



Outpouring of support for those displaced by fire renews 'faith in humanity'

Lee's Summit Social Services still helping families left homeless after November fire in apartment complex.

BY RUSS PULLEY
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Thanks to Lee's Summit Social Services and a generous community, families left homeless by a recent Lee's Summit apartment fire are moving forward with their lives.

About 11 families, a total

of 21 people, were displaced by a Nov. 14 explosion and fire in an apartment complex at 2419 S.E. Missouri 291.

Tony Campbell, 59, a resident who was also the maintenance man, died two days later from injuries he suffered from the accident. Authorities believe he was lighting a furnace, which resulted in a propane explosion.

Lee's Summit Social Services Director Matt Sanning said that of families displaced, most are

living with family or friends or have permanent housing. Two as of last week were still in a hotel being paid for by the agency.

Sanning said the agency has distributed beds, clothes, hundreds of pounds of food, televisions, coffee makers and microwaves to the displaced families. Nearly 200 bed nights at hotels have been provided.

"Overall, we wished to have more families living on their own by this time,

but it's also a very difficult time due to the holidays," Sanning said. "This has been a very challenging time for the families, but they've allowed us to help them through this time.

"We've been lucky to have the community behind these efforts, which has made it possible for all of us to work through each obstacle as it comes up."

He said the agency would continue working with the families in 2017.

SEE FIRE, 2A



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James Putnam sorts through rubble, salvaging belongings from the apartment he had to leave after a November explosion and fire. He and his partner, Elaine Bailey, were among 21 people left homeless. They received help from Lee's Summit Social Services.



ALFREDO HUGHEY Special to the Journal

Board members of Giving Hope and Help gathered a feminine hygiene product drive in December. They are (from left): Lennie Parnell, Stacie Green, Kevin McClellan, Jessica McClellan and Sheila Wilson.

From cancer patients to abuse victims, nonprofit has a broad reach

Giving Hope and Help recently donated more than 90,000 feminine products to domestic abuse shelters in Harrisonville and Lee's Summit.

BY MAX LONDBERG
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Jessica McClellan's mission is to support survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence.

But it's also to uplift cancer patients by visiting them in their hospital rooms.

And to help offset some of the costs of enrolling in college for low-income students.

McClellan, of Lee's Sum-

mit, founded Giving Hope and Help in 2013, and she is galvanizing the community to give to victims of violence, the underprivileged and the ill. Unlike many nonprofits, hers aims to support a broad range of people throughout the Kansas City-metro area.

"The main reason I do this work is because I love to help others," McClellan said.

A recent donation drive by the nonprofit, which took place Dec. 10 in Kansas City, benefited domestic violence victims in Cass County and Lee's Summit.

McClellan and the Giving Hope team hosted a drive to gather feminine products for domestic violence shelters. McClel-

lan said more than 100,000 products were donated between the nonprofit's Texas and Kansas City branches, with more than 60,000 in Kansas City.

Some of the products will be donated to Hope House in Lee's Summit and Hope Haven in Harrisonville. Both are domestic abuse shelters.

MaryAnne Metheny, CEO of Hope House, said the shelter received two carloads full of the products in early December.

"It's wonderful that they've taken this on as their cause to collect those items," Metheny said. "It's truly helpful to us because

SEE GIVING HOPE, 7A

FROM PAGE 1A

GIVING HOPE

we don't have to worry about having enough. We're very grateful to them for doing this for us."

Hope Haven in Harrisonville received about four large bags full of feminine products, according to Executive Director Charlie Jennings.

"Families come into the shelter often with only what they could fit into their vehicle or even less, just the clothes on their back," Jennings wrote by email.

"To be able to provide necessary items to each woman who enters the shelter not only provides them with something that many people may forget to pack or can't afford after fleeing a domestic violence situation, but it also gives them a sense of self.

More than 100 volunteers and 50 organizations assisted with the feminine product drive.

A Boy Scout donated 3,000 products as part of his Eagle Scout project, McClellan said.

She added the Carter Broadcast Group was a vital sponsor of the event.

Next month, Giving Hope will continue its philanthropic work by filling

bags with toiletries and inspirational items for cancer patients. Volunteers will deliver the "Love Bags 4 Cancer" directly to Research Medical Center and the Kansas City VA Medical Center.

The bags will be donated on Valentine's Day and Mother's Day.

Other hospitals may sign up to participate in the coming months.

In June, education will be the focus with the "Education is Your Passport" program.

McClellan said the nonprofit gives bedding linens to college freshmen in need of financial assistance. The program also awards a scholarship, and McClellan said she is working to entreat local companies to donate new laptops for the program's recipients. The program also links students

with mentors.

"I was granted help through college," McClellan said. "It's my way of giving back."

McClellan is a former motivational speaker, and she said she founded the nonprofit in 2013 after having health with a violent situation herself.

"I was moved to found Giving Hope and Help to be the voice of the voiceless and bring awareness to domestic violence, sexual assault and the need for feminine care across the globe," McClellan said.

Indeed, 1,700 sanitary napkins were donated to a girls' school in Nairobi, Kenya in June. A few months before, Giving Hope donated 1,800 feminine products and toiletries to girls in Cambodia, McClellan said.

McClellan hopes to continue expanding the nonprofit's reach.

"I feel most gratified when I'm helping others," she said.

Learn more

Visit the nonprofit's website at givinghopeandhelp.org to find its six donation drop-off locations, sign up to volunteer or make a financial donation.

To apply for a college scholarship, click here, or visit givinghopeandhelp.org/events#eiyp. Scholarship applications are accepted from Jan. 13 to March 31.