

Erath County Community Members Join in Support

RESIDENTS IN STEPHENVILLE, TEXAS, GATHER TO AID TEXAS PANHANDLE FIRE VICTIMS



Picture by Dakota New

By Maddison Jaureguito

STEPHENVILLE, TX (April 12, 2017) - For countless individuals living in the Texas Panhandle, March 7, was just going to be another Tuesday like all of the rest. No one could have predicted the devastation that took place instead that day.

Triggered by a few powerline sparks, a wildfire quickly spread and raged with burning flames that destroyed everything in its path. It didn't take long for locals, firefighters, and neighboring counties to realize that the dry acreage and high winds were fueling the fire beyond immediate containment.

The damage was heartbreaking. The fire claimed the lives of innocent ranchers, homes and cattle that covered land stretching across three states. Ranchers were left hopeless and desperate.

Gil Kalinec, a Tarleton alumni, caught wind of the tragedy when a good buddy of his called him up for help. His friend needed to haul a load of hay to the Panhandle where his girlfriend had family.

“We had more hay than haulers so I started making phone calls and we went from seven rigs to fourteen rigs,” explains Kalinec.

Kalinec and his friends left early Sunday morning to haul the hay. Eight hours later, with a few stops along the way, the convoy pulled into Mclean, Texas.

“When we topped the hill I thought it was going to be like any other hill we’d driven over and I was amazed at what I saw,” Kalinec says with sadness, “It was crazy how black the land was. My heart sank and it all kind of started to set in.”

Along with Kalinec, Dakota New, a Stephenville resident, and his friends wanted to help in any way possible. After seeing the devastation on social media and the news, New decided against just sitting around waiting and began planning on how to help first hand.

“I made a few phone calls and got 500 round bales donated and all we had to do was truck it up there so we got a big group together for the first trip to haul the round bales.”

Kalinec and New both witnessed first hand the devastation of the fire's fury when they saw that the land had transformed from green and beautiful to dead and black.

“It was unlike anything I had ever seen and we knew we had to keep bringing more supplies and hay to help as much as we could,” New discloses, “We’ve made three trips now and we are blessed to be helping the pastor of the McLean Cowboy Church rebuild his fences and feed his cattle.”

Over a month later volunteers from all over Texas and surrounding states have yet to cease helping the fire victims.

“Our most recent trip was last weekend and we rode through all the pastures that were burnt up and everything is starting to grow back greener than ever,” says New with excitement, “It was a beautiful sight to see and astonishing that the cattle’s lungs are finally clearing up.”

Kalinec and New say they aren’t near done helping. Both have a few more trips planned ahead of them and intend to help as long as they are needed. For more information on helping the fire victims you can contact Dakota New via phone at: 512-517-7670

Sources:

Dakota New

Gil Kalinec

Amarillo Globe News: <http://amarillo.com/news/local-news/2017-03-07/texas-panhandle-wildfires-take-lives-burn-nearly-500000-acres>