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September 18, 2020



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From the Desk of Susan Hearn, Executive Director

As we all learn the details of the Almeda Fire's immeasurable devastation, we wish to share our heartfelt condolences to those who have lost loved ones, homes, businesses, and treasured possessions and memories. We are uplifted by the outpouring of equally powerful support, tangible assistance and community spirit that is arising to help those in need. We believe in the renewable power of compassion and care that will aid our resilient community during this recovery. Our deepest gratitude goes out to the fire fighters, public safety officers and community leaders and helpers across our region.

When the Celia's House leaders gathered to assess the entire experience it became clear that on the night of September 8, every team member brought their best in the service of others. The Board of Directors and I wish to express gratitude for Elyssia Krenzer's calm, reassuring leadership, Mackenzie Mejia's proactive and efficient preparations, the "can-do" willingness of Joshua Atto, the steady perseverance of Sarah Bieniek and Nita Hartin's expertise and compassion working with the team and residents. Perhaps Nurse Nita summed it up best when she noted, "There was a deep sense of camaraderie that developed throughout the evening" even as the team vigilantly watched the fire's advance across the valley.

Celia's House Almeda Fire Evacuation:

 Forward to a Friend

Our Story of Gratitude, Open Hearts and Presence

At 11:05 a.m. on September 8, with a birds-eye view of the newly starting Alameda fire from her home office, Executive Director Susan Hearn alerted staff to what she hoped would be a small concern. By 11:15 a.m. staff were tracking fire-path details from police and fire scanner reports to assist in emergency planning.

Thus began 24 hours of caregivers, administration, board members, hospitals, businesspeople, and volunteers working together to make decisions about the care and safety for our nine hospice residents at Celia's House in Holmes Park. For CNA caregivers Mackenzie Mejia and Lulu (Lourdes) Cervantes, each worked their shifts that day, even after learning their own homes were threatened or destroyed.



View from Celia's House at 4:37PM

Knowing that many of the residents would need to be moved on gurneys via non-emergency transport vehicles, the decision to evacuate some residents at Level 2, rather than wait for Level 3 orders began around 7 p.m. No matter what was needed or called for, Celia's House community of competent, caring staff took action. Luckily, months ahead of this emergency, administrative staff in response to COVID 19, had already trained to augment regular caregiving, enabling a nimble response to this kind of unexpected event.



View from Celia's House 10:10PM

During all of the uncertainty, Susan Hearn reached out to our community of supporters and partners to secure safe harbor. Administrator Elyssia Krenzer coordinated the evacuation of the highest need residents in shifts - completing those transports around 1:30 in the morning. Nurse Nita Hartin worked with CNAs Joshua Atto and Mackenzie Mejia to coordinate all the important medical records, medications and supplies, and attending to the residents. Assisting Elyssia Krenzer, administrative assistant Sarah Bieniek did whatever was needed; calling families; relieving caregivers; settling and resettling residents; helping with transport.

Initially Will Forsyth, son of Honorary Board Member, Dr. John Forsyth and owner of Pear Valley Senior Living in Central Point responded to requests for temporary quarters for Celia's House residents, until a newly erupted fire required Central Point to evacuate. As Asante Rogue Regional Medical Center was in similar proximity of the encroaching Almeda fire, Providence Medford Medical Center's CEO Chris Pizzi and CNO Jen Culbertsen thankfully responded quickly to our request with a creative offer of unoccupied beds in its sleep lab for our evacuees. Mobile Care Transport graciously and quickly stepped in to assist in the evacuation of our first three residents.

Thirty-six hours later, safe, tired and exhausted, relief shifts were in place and residents returned to Celia's House. We are deeply grateful to our Southern Oregon community that responded so valiantly, with open hearts, hands, and resources to support one another during this tragic historic event.

Stories and Heroes

By Sue Carroll, Volunteer Coordinator

How does one start coming to terms, as a community, with the devastation and loss we are left with from this inferno that ripped through our community, our homes and our hearts? Cecily, who supports chefs Karen and Kevin in the kitchen, wisely said, after generously listening to my whole story, "Right now, what we can do to help ourselves is talk, listen and love."

My story of the Alameda fire began up at the Sky Lakes area where I was backpacking with a friend. On Tuesday, the smoke that flowed into this beautiful wilderness was so thick it almost blocked the sun. The temperature dropped and we knew something was very wrong. After turning the airplane mode off on our phones, the texts about the fire started coming in rapid-fire from people concerned about us and informing us of the spread. I live in Phoenix. As we drove out of the Sky Lakes area, I thought about the possibility of my home and everything I own being gone. That feeling took me one step closer to the experience of being a resident at Celia's house, the emotions involved with letting go of possessions that might have been dear, the concept of impermanence and the acute realization of what's really important in life.

After witnessing loss and tragedy over and over again as I drove through my community, I knew Celia's House was where I wanted and needed to go to find some semblance of normalcy; to be part of the gratitude and support that lives inside the walls of Celia's House; to help others as a way of helping myself. It's powerful medicine. I went to work the next day. We were short staffed as a result of the evacuation. I worked two 12-hour shifts subbing for a CNA. It's work I haven't done before, but received enough on the job training from some real pros to be helpful. It was an enlightening and humbling experience.

Since much of CNA work is done behind closed doors, what they do has been a mystery to me. I had the opportunity to witness up close and personal, not just the competency they display in their duties, but the calm compassion in their voices, the reassurance they give with a hand on a shoulder, and the respect they have for our residents; in short, their innate humanity. Those are the qualities that we all need right now to help our fellow community members cope. I used to think those signs that read, "Heroes Work Here" were corny. Now I know how true those words are, not just because health care workers show up during a pandemic, but because they show up *every day* to do hard work and make a difference in the lives of vulnerable people.

What can we all do to not only get through this, but grow stronger as a community? We can do what we do at Celia's House every day. We can tell our stories. We can listen and we can love. We can each be a hero by showing up for each other with acts of compassion and kindness, even if it's simply a reassuring hand on a shoulder. We can do this day after day for as long as it takes until our community members are housed and their real healing can start taking place. And then we can keep showing up. We can.

Note: I eventually learned that my house and two cats had been spared. The fire came within two blocks of my home.

Don't Underestimate Kindness

By Karen Amarotico, Celia's House Chef

With all the devastation due to the fires, I wasn't sure what message I could possibly share with you. On the one hand, I am extremely grateful that my home was untouched by a fire that began only a few blocks away. On the other hand, I am grieving for my friends, coworkers, and community members who were not as fortunate, and have lost

everything. At first, I was overwhelmed because alone I can do very little. But then I looked around and saw what others were doing... creating GoFundMe pages for friends and family members, collecting food and supplies for those affected, and donating money to the relief efforts in our valley. Each act of kindness that we demonstrate to one another is a step towards healing. You may be just the beacon of hope that is needed at that moment. Don't underestimate what you bring to the world!

Many years ago, I worked at a restaurant and we had an abundance of bread. It was too much for our needs, so I gathered it up and brought it to a local agency serving those in need. When I walked in the door with the box full of bread, the receptionist looked at me with wide eyes. She shared with me that she had just told the director that there was no bread for lunch... and then I arrived. I believe that is how the Universe works best. When we act on our hunches, miracles can happen.

There are many opportunities for us to be kind and generous right now. Please share the ways that you have found to brighten someone's day or that helped rebuild their future. Together, let's create some miracles. And thank you all for being so wonderful!

Here's a simple dessert idea to welcome in the fall. Peel and slice 4 large, tart apples. In a skillet, melt 3 tbs. Butter over medium heat, and then toss in the apples. Add 3 tbs. brown sugar and cook the apples until they are tender and well glazed, about 7-10 minutes. Season with a pinch of ground cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream.



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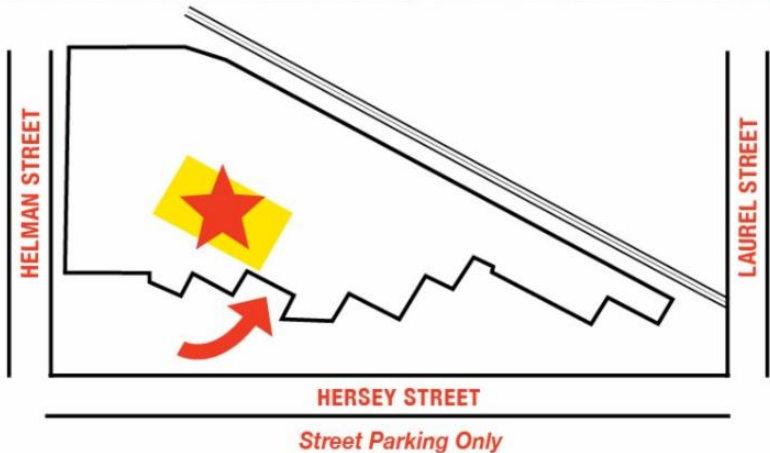
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