

LOCAL NEWS

Donations pour in for residents displaced by devastating Tustin apartment fire



Jim Palmer, president of the Orange County Rescue Mission, sorts through donations to victims of the fire that destroyed a Tustin apartment complex on Feb. 12. (Courtesy of Jim Palmer)

By **SUSAN CHRISTIAN GOULDING** | sgoulding@scng.com | Orange County Register

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Tragic though they are, disasters can bring out the best in humankind.



In the days following the fire that destroyed a Tustin apartment complex Feb. 12, hundreds of people dropped off clothing and food all over town. Boxes overflowing with jackets and blankets stacked up outside the police department, the senior center, the library and churches.

As of this week, drop-offs have been consolidated at one main location – the Orange County Rescue Mission, 1 Hope Drive, Tustin. Items will be accepted from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

“Just this morning, St. Cecilia Catholic Church came in with eight carloads,” shelter president Jim Palmer said Tuesday, Feb. 18. “We are sorting through about 20 pallets of donations so far.”

The predawn blaze left at least 62 people displaced from Chatham Village Apartments on Williams Street. [A 59-year-old man who lived there has been charged with setting the fire](#), which took 120 firefighters hours to extinguish.



The Orange County Rescue Mission is the main drop-off site for donations for victims of the fire that destroyed a Tustin apartment complex on Feb. 12. (Courtesy of Jim Palmer)

A second drop-off for bulkier items will become available Sunday, Feb. 23, said Erin McPherson Nielsen, executive director of the Tustin Community Foundation. Furniture and large appliances can be left at Aldersgate United Methodist Church, 1201 Irvine Blvd., Tustin.

Nielsen said surplus donations eventually will be distributed among charitable organizations. “There are so many needs community-wide,” she said.



Palmer said that, "to start rebuilding their lives," the displaced apartment dwellers need hygiene products, towels and, preferably, newly purchased clothing.

"They lost everything – cellphones, cars, you name it," Palmer said. "I hear people talk about what they wish they'd grabbed."

About 26 suddenly homeless residents are still staying at a temporary evacuation site at the Tustin Area Senior Center, Palmer said.

Nielsen said the widespread generosity has been heartwarming and reassuring.

"We have not been surprised by the outpouring of love," she said. "This is a great community that steps up in times of crisis. We take care of each other."

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Susan Christian Goulding | Reporter



After majoring in journalism at the University of Texas, Susan Christian Goulding got her start as a copy editor and reporter at the (late, great) Los Angeles Herald Examiner. She then worked at the (late, great) Santa Monica Outlook and the Daily Breeze as a features editor, writer and columnist. She moved to the Orange County bureau of the Los Angeles Times as a features and business writer. After that five-year stint, she worked as a correspondent for People magazine and a regular freelancer for Readers Digest while raising her two kids, Erin and Matt. During this time, she also wrote a weekly column for the Daily Breeze. Next, she gave up all possibility of free time and earned a teaching credential and masters at UCI. She taught English for four often rewarding and always challenging years in Compton, then at LMU and El Camino College. Missing journalism, Goulding circled back to her original career last year, joining the Orange County Register as a reporter. She also enjoys her return to column writing for the newspaper's OC Home magazine.

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