

# College shelters a community in crisis

Ronald Kraft

Nov 18, 2017

When fire broke out in the early hours of Oct. 9, Napa county emergency services heroes were joined by employees of Napa Valley College as the first to respond. Untrained in how to operate an emergency shelter but undaunted, the college's coaches, faculty, and administrators supported evacuees, set up a shelter, and accepted countless donations from our generous community.

It began Monday morning when NVC Trustee Kyle Iverson alerted College Police Chief Ken Arnold, who coordinated with Napa County about opening as a shelter. When Ken arrived on campus, he met a pair of evacuees from the already-filled Crosswalk Church – NVC soccer coaches Randi Simmons and Kristine Mason – and NVC athletic equipment manager Mike Ronald.

This small group got the college lights turned on and began alerting other college staff. Evacuees and volunteers began arriving at the college gym even before it was “officially” announced that the college was open as a shelter.

So began an eight-day, three-shelter (gymnasium, Student Activities Center, and Police Academy training room) operation that served more than 780 evacuees, registered 2,000 volunteers and distributed 209 pallets of clothing, food, water, toiletries and toys donated by our generous community.

The service performed by the college staff in working with local governments, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and a sea of generous

businesses, volunteers and donors was unprecedented in the college's 75-year history.

Led by Associate Dean Jerry Dunlap and all of his coaches, the donation center was organized and effective.

Facilities Director Matt Christensen kept operations going in the midst of a fire that threatened the college itself.

The vice presidents, deans and other administrators and staff worked in shifts, around the clock, to make sure the shelter was fully equipped, the campus secure, the evacuees protected and the community served.

Kevin Twohey, from Napa County Emergency Services, expressed his sincere appreciation for the college's help and support to the community.

"Ken Arnold and the college stepped up when we needed a large shelter facility in the midst of all the evacuations," said Twohey. "They really brought their A-team to the table. The facilities were great, but the people and staff were even better."

Many college faculty and staff were displaced during the fire and a special thank you goes out to the generous support of local hotels and resorts. Among many, the Meritage and River Terrance Inn were exceptional partners during this tragedy.

As part of our NVC Shelter Team, I have never been more impressed with a group of professionals, called upon to perform a new job with such dedication and sense of purpose. They gave with all their heart, demonstrating their dedication and passion to our community and to public service, during one of our community's toughest moments.

I believe our community knows that we understand our responsibility to respond to any future crisis, and to apply the lessons we learned. For example, we learned to protect our vulnerable technology, as our Internet service was destroyed on the first night. We learned that to accommodate a large number of residents our staging areas can be improved.

Most importantly, we learned that such disasters bring the community spirit alive, as people come together in common purpose, to serve each other and care for our fellow residents. We all learned about generosity in the face of disaster.

Finally, we learned that our college staff members will respond immediately and work diligently to protect others. We learned to “manage chaos” by focusing on serving community members who lost food, shelter and clothing.

And we learned that the college and the community can depend on one another to continue to serve during any major event. Our college must be maintained as a safe, well-managed space for our students, campus family – and as the recent fires reinforced – the entire community that we have dedicated ourselves to serving.

And as I’ve said many times, “the college stands ready.” Our goal is to continue to serve as often as we are called upon.

**Ronald Kraft, President**

**Napa Valley College**