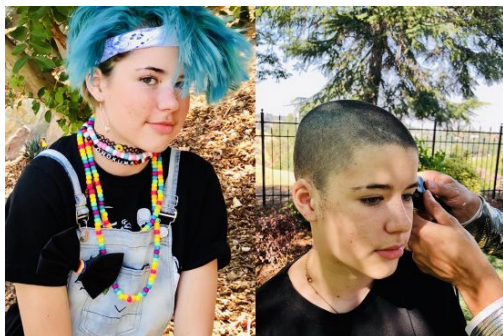


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## Lamorinda steps up to aid LNU Complex fire victims

By Nick Marnell



Maddie before and after Photos provided

A director from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, an Orinda business owner and a young Lafayette girl responded to the aftermath of the LNU Lightning Complex Fire in a big way by donating time and energy, food and even hair to raise money for Vacaville fire victims.

The complex of fires charred more than 363,000 acres in the hills around Napa, Fairfield and Vacaville, destroying nearly 1,500 structures and killing five. The fires began early in the morning of Aug. 17 after a barrage of lightning strikes in the area.

Michael Donner of MOFD, who spent 31 years with the Oakland Fire Department, said he distributed \$50,000 that he collected from donors to victims of the Paradise Fire in 2018. He wanted to do something similar for the Vacaville fire victims.

Through his fire network, Donner got in touch with Eli Held, a firefighter-paramedic with the Folsom Fire Department. Held, owner of Muertos Coffee in Vacaville, helped save his parents' home in the middle of the night during the LNU Complex fire. "It was lucky for us, but not so much for many members of the community," Held said.

Held drew upon his numerous connections in the Vacaville business community, including Ashley Gall, who runs the Rise and Redemption clothing and home decor boutique in the city. As a way to help fire victims in the area, Gall and Held agreed to put on a downtown fundraiser the weekend of Aug. 29-30.

"Some of these people may have been lucky enough to find a place to live, but some don't even have a place to sit," Held said.

Donner met with Held and Gall and worked through a list of those who had lost their homes and reached out to many of the victims. "Those we determined to help were based largely on our instinct," said Donner, who at the event distributed more than \$15,000 he said he collected from many Lamorinda residents.

Recipients were given personalized cards infused with cash. Some folks cried. Some screamed with joy. One mother of three appeared so bewildered as she accepted her donation she could not even speak.

Chloe Carroll and her two boys lost their Vacaville home in the fire. The family received \$1,000 cash and gift card. "I was blown away. Someone had given my name, and told me to meet downtown. It opened my eyes that there are still good people in the world," Carroll said.

But the biggest star of the fundraising event was a 12-year-old Lafayette girl.

Maddie David did a complete head shave, live over Facebook the last week of August, and raised \$1,650 for the fire victims, plus \$1,500 for the All Good Living Foundation in Alameda.

"We thought it would be cool to do something to help others," said Maddie's mom, Sarah David. "What the heck, we we're stuck in quarantine anyway."

The family got in touch with Donner, who suggested they take the cash to the Vacaville fundraiser. Maddie met many of the fire victims and posed for photos throughout the event. "Her mom must be very proud," Carroll said.

Michael Karp, owner of the Fourth Bore Tap Room and Grill in Orinda Theatre Square, also heeded Donner's request for help. Karp spent four years reconditioning a 1971 fire engine, adding an oven to the vehicle, and the Vacaville fundraiser proved to be one of the first public events where he could unveil the new apparatus. "It was a no-brainer to bring it there," Karp said.

Karp provided 75 pizzas and 60 meatball sandwiches to the attendees over the fundraising weekend. "I had so much fun putting smiles on people's faces," he said.

For many of the August wildfire victims, those may have been their first smiles in more than a week.

What does LNU Lightning Complex mean?

LNU stands for the Sonoma-Lake-Napa Unit - the name of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection operational unit in charge of the fire response.

Lightning Complex refers to the amalgamation of eight fires in the North Bay and East Bay sparked by lightning strikes the morning of Aug. 17.

California comprises 21 Cal Fire operational units. All of Lamorinda resides in the Santa Clara Unit - SCU, in Cal Fire-speak. - N. Marnell



Michael Karp and Sasha Zukanoff of Fourth Bore Photo Nick Marnell



Michael Donner, center, with Ashley Gall and Eli Held Photo Nick Marnell

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