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FEATURED

Community aiding in relief efforts; online fundraisers set up

BY SHANE MONACO | TELEGRAM STAFF

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Salado residents survey the debris of a home left by an EF-3 tornado that struck the area.

Shane Monaco | Telegram

SALADO — Support started pouring in for those affected by Tuesday's tornado in Salado.

Local residents as well as organizations from around the state worked to help those whose homes were destroyed or damaged by the tornado by helping to clear local roads and salvage what was left of homes.

Bell County officials said employees from Williamson County, the Texas Department of Transportation, the Bartlett Electric Cooperative and the Texas Department of Emergency Management, among others, have already come out. Officials said more help is expected in the coming days as needs are identified.

“Our community’s generosity has already been expressed and is greatly appreciated as we work to recover from this whole event,” Bell County Judge David Blackburn said.

Local community organizations have offered aid to those affected by the storm, collecting donations for people in need and setting aside space for those displaced.

Salado United Methodist Church, 650 Royal St., announced that it had a shelter for anyone in need at their building. County officials said the shelter has not taken in anyone as of Wednesday afternoon.

The Garden of Hope Resource Center, 10208 Cedar Knob Church Road in Salado, announced that it will help provide needed supplies to those affected. Supplies provided by the center include clothing for men, women and children, as well as toiletries.

Blackburn said one of the biggest needs from those affected by the tornado, and others living in the area affected by power outages, was water.

Another organization offering their support to the county is the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, which sent out a representative Wednesday to check on Cedar Valley Baptist Church, destroyed in the tornado, and its pastor.

Glen Pearce, who is with the convention, said he came from the Fort Worth area to survey the area’s need ahead of the organization’s normal disaster coordinator who was on an airplane flight Wednesday. Pearce said the organization has teams of volunteers they could send to Salado, but were waiting to hear from Bell County on what is needed.

Pearce said the organization likes to wait until they talk with the county to make sure they do not add to the problem when they try to help.

“We will help anyone we possibly can, but my responsibility as a field representative is to check on the individual church and pastor then go from there,” Pearce said. “We help with whatever is necessary. A lot of times it is chainsaws and helping them clean out the building if it is salvageable.”

County hotlines

On Wednesday, Bell County announced the creation of two phone lines related to the tornado.

The first phone number, 254-534-4562, is aimed at helping those affected by the tornados and in need of help.

The second phone number released by the county, 254-534-2217, will focus on directing those looking to volunteer or donate supplies and equipment. Blackburn said that anyone interested in spending their time helping the affected area, or who has equipment or donations to supply should call the number.

Salado village officials said the drop-off point for county donations will be at the Salado Civic Center, 601 N. Main St.

James Stafford, spokesman for the county, said both phone lines would go live on Thursday morning.

The two lines will operate from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Stafford said the lines would not be open this Friday because it is Good Friday.

Online fundraisers

Many of those who have been affected have looked to their communities for aid, asking for donations through websites such as GoFundMe.

One local organization looking for aid is Victory Baptist Church in Salado, which has started a GoFundMe page in order to raise \$20,000. The page has so far only received \$250 towards that goal.

Those interested in donating to the church can go to <https://bit.ly/3rqGnEK>.

Resident Stephen Perez has also started a fundraiser on the website, requesting money for his sister and her family whose home was destroyed by the tornado.

Perez said on the fundraising site that his sister, her husband and their two children, were severely injured during the storm. He said the fundraiser, Rio's family donation, aims to raise at least \$80,000 for the family to help rebuild their home and put them back on their feet.

"I would really appreciate the help of others to help rebuild their home after a tornado wiped away everything they have down to the foundation," Perez said.

As of Wednesday evening, the fundraiser has so far received 85 donations totaling \$4,525 from the community.

People who would like to donate to the Rio family can find the fundraiser at <https://bit.ly/3rMbmeX>.

Madison McGregor has also started a fundraiser for her mother, stepfather and siblings, after the family's trailer home was destroyed in the tornado. As of Wednesday afternoon, McGregor has raised \$5,705 of her \$12,000 goal.

To donate to the family, people can go to <https://bit.ly/3JzpYEK>.

A fundraiser created by Emily Dunn hopes to raise \$15,000 for the Califano family of Salado after the tornado badly damaged their home and their recreational vehicle. So far Dunn has raised \$11,295, with those interested in donating able to go to <https://bit.ly/37SPA20>.

Telegram City Editor Eric E. Garcia contributed to this report.

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