



# Final Tea Fire funds dispursed

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In the wake of last year's Tea fire, hundreds of locals donated heartily to the Tea Fire Response Fund, which raised \$435,310 for fire victims.

Throughout the year, the United Way of Santa Barbara County, American Red Cross, and about 20 other organizations sifted through applications and distributed the funds at five intervals, the last of which was yesterday when officials announced the fund had disbursed the final \$44,101.

"Every penny" went to fire victims, said G. Paul Didier, president  
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DAILY SOUND / Victor Maccharoli

Right, Chef Carlos Lima receives a certificate of commendation from President and CEO of United Way of Santa Barbara County Paul Didier at the 5th and final disbursement of funds for the Tea Fire victims.

## **FIRE FUNDS**

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and CEO of United Way, at a news conference yesterday. "The community, all of us together, really deserve a pat on the back that we were able to accomplish [this]."

As community members hastily began donating in the days after the Nov. 13 fire, the Response Fund was established to identify and provide assistance to victims and families with unmet needs.

Joel Goforth, a United Way employee who served on the Tea Fire Fund Screening Subcommittee, said to

her knowledge, the only applications that were turned down were filed by residents with adequate insurance or other resources.

The Response Fund also helped ensure the money was distributed fairly.

According to George Leis, president and CEO of Santa Barbara Bank & Trust, who also acted as a spokesman for the Response Fund, the money, and distribution of it, was handled through a three-tier screening and oversight system.

The first tier consisted of a professional case manager, who worked closely with applicants to deter-

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## **UNITED WAY**

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mine need. The case manager then made a recommendation to a screening sub-committee, which consisted of 13 volunteers from community organizations. Then, an oversight committee of local leaders evaluated the recommendations.

The money was primarily spent in five categories, the largest by far, at 43 percent, was on housing. About 27 percent was spent on self-sufficiency, which Leis said included helping a construction worker buy tools. Fourteen percent went to medical expenses, 13 percent to household needs, like furniture and clothing, and 3 percent was spent on school supplies.

A graph showed how the needs of fire victims changed throughout the year. In February, about 90 percent of the \$77,203 disbursement went to self sufficiency, while less than 20 percent of yesterday's disbursement was needed in this area. Furniture and housing each accounted for 40 percent of the final disbursement.

Didier said 101 individuals or families received a portion of the \$435,310, an average of \$4,310 per disbursement.

A similar Response Fund was established to help victims of the Jesusita fire, which destroyed 80 homes in May.

Didier, fielding questions from the media, declined to get into the specifics of the Jesusita fire Response Fund, saying only that a news

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conference would be held in the near future to announce the first disbursement. He declined to say how much had been donated to the Jesusita fund.

As emergencies go, Didier said it's best to deal with incidents separately. He also stressed the differences between the two incidents, noting that a healthy portion of the more than 200 homes destroyed during the Tea fire were occupied by renters and lower-income residents, while a more affluent demographic that appeared to be well-insured lost homes in the Jesusita fire.

"The need per say can't be measured just on the number of homes or something like that," Didier said.

About 80 percent of the total donated to the Tea Fire Fund was given within two weeks of the fire, Didier said, adding that approximately 600 individual donors gave.

"Out of the ashes, good things happen," he said.