

Hope City named Middletown Days grand marshal; group finishes south county rebuilding work

LAKE COUNTY NEWS REPORTS POSTED ON TUESDAY, 08 JUNE 2021 02:44



From left to right, Travis Cox, volunteer coordinator; Bill and Wendi Johnson, construction managers; Valerie and Kevin Cox of Hope City; and Bella, Kristan and Tra Hay, volunteer housing directors. Courtesy photo.

MIDDLETOWN, Calif. — The organizers of Middletown Days have selected an organization that has played an important role in rebuilding the south county in the wake of the Valley fire to be the Middletown Days grand marshal for the 60th annual Middletown Days Parade.

On Friday, May 28, Hope City — a ministry of the faith-based Hope Crisis Response Network — officially finished its work rebuilding homes for Valley fire survivors and hosted an open house to celebrate the occasion.

It's for all of the work they've done for Lake County residents that the group has received the Middletown Days grand marshal honor.

Community members can show their appreciation as Hope City heads up the parade, which begins at 10 a.m. Saturday, June 19.

At the celebration that immediately follows at the Middletown Central Park stage, Hope City members will be presented with a commemorative plaque.

Kevin Cox, chief executive officer and founder of Hope City, got started in disaster recovery with crisis counseling. He quickly realized there were other needs that were not being met.

Cox decided to jump in where they were most needed, rebuilding, and Hope City immediately became a model program with the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Cox also ended up writing many of the disaster materials that FEMA uses today.

To date, Hope City has assisted 26,000 families in getting back into their homes. The organization seeks out grants wherever possible to fund their work.

One of the largest single donations to Hope City for the Valley fire rebuild, \$1 million, [came from Guenoc developer Yiming Xu in 2017](#). That donation and the donations from Lake County Rising helped to ensure there were no costs to the homeowners for the work done by Hope City.

Hope City has been working in Paradise, Butte, Mendocino, Sonoma and Shasta, and also helping out in Napa. Currently it is opening a Hope City in Siskiyou County. With 52 wildfires in the last five years it's becoming harder and harder to find new donors.

Hope City makes it a point to circulate the donations in the same communities in which they are building. It does this by purchasing lumber and building materials locally. The organization also feeds volunteers by shopping locally for groceries.

Hope City has just 12 employees. Cox's wife, Valarie, is the administrative assistant, handling community outreach, media and grant writing, and is also a disaster case manager.

The organization relies heavily on volunteers from faith based organizations all over North America. The volunteers donate their time, one week at a time, to come and help people "rebuild their homes and their lives."

Cox makes sure the volunteers have beds, not cots. They make sure to provide good meals and entertainment when the volunteers aren't working. They have all the materials they need and all the tools are in great working condition.

"The focus is on the families and restoration," Kevin Cox said.

And, when they take care of the volunteers, productivity goes up in the field.

Before the Valley fire, Cox had been trying to get his wife to move to California, but she didn't really want to go. She told him, "If God calls, we'll go."

Meanwhile, Cox was going through a lot of health problems and thought perhaps he was done in the disaster field. Six weeks later they got the Valley fire call.

Hope City was contacted by churches in Santa Rosa and Cox arrived in Middletown a few days after the Valley fire started.

He eventually worked out a deal with the Middletown Central Park Association. In exchange for allowing the volunteers to utilize the property during the yearslong rebuild, their building (also the site of the old Middletown Senior Center) was torn down and a home base dormitory was built by Hope City.

On Friday, May 28, Hope City turned over the keys just in time for the 60th annual Middletown Days celebration.

While Cox, who grew up in Sonoma, is finding it hard to say goodbye, he is looking forward to getting back to Indiana to see his granddaughter, with whom he and his wife FaceTime daily.

Middletown Central Park Association offered its thanks to Hope City for the difference they've made in the lives of Lake County residents over the past five and a half years.