

Firms step up to help out Oroville evacuees

By Laura Urseny, Chico Enterprise-Record

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Chico >> While evacuees from the Oroville area are asking where to go and what to do, local businesses and residents in Chico are asking “How can we help them?”

On Sunday, nearly 200,000 residents in a swath from Oroville south beyond Marysville were given evacuation notices because of the possible failure of the emergency spillway at Oroville Dam.

But now south Butte County residents are tucked away at emergency evacuation shelters, friends homes and local hotels or campgrounds.

Putting themselves in other’s shoes, businesses are reaching out to help.

Sisco Enterprises, which owns a number of Round Table Pizza restaurants, sent 60 pizzas to the Silver Dollar Fairgrounds for evacuees there.

Four Round Tables in Oroville, Gridley and Yuba City were closed, and many of those employees found themselves under evacuation notices, according to marketing director Teri Hernandez.

Knowing that their employees were being affected helped prompt the Chico-based franchise to jump in, and Hernandez thought it might be repeated since the evacuation hasn’t been lifted.

She said the four closed stores represent about 80 employees.

She also thought that Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea was doing an excellent job, providing the public accurate information and keeping everyone safe.

When Salvation Army Lt. Arwyn Rodriguera was finishing up with breakfast service at the Silver Dollar Fairground shelter Monday, she realized she was missing some items for lunch and headed to Cash and Carry in Chico for supplies. Cash and Carry sells institutional-size foods and food-related products, often to local restaurants.

Cash and Carry store manager Jerry Lee said he saw a lot of business on Monday. Reached in the morning, he said breakfast supplies from coffee and bacon to eggs were heading out the door.

Considering the volume of business was about doubled his normal Monday, Lee was a little worried not only about meeting demands, but getting more. Trucks that usually bring up supplies were being rerouted because of the road closures in the Oroville area.

While there were about 800 evacuees overnighing free at the Silver Dollar Fairground, those who sought a hotel room were generally out of luck, according to Katie Simmons at the Chico Chamber of Commerce. She and her staff called and sent out emails trying to find vacancies, but weren’t very successful. Some of the evacuees were headed to Redding for rooms.

Emergency services providers were taking up a lot of hotel space, she noted.

Any business providing help to evacuees was welcome to email her at katie@chicochamber.com

“We’ll send out the information.”

Responding to the idea there had been price gouging by businesses, Simmons said she hadn’t heard anything like that.

Azad’s Martial Arts Center volunteered as an evacuation shelter, and there were a few people there Monday morning.

With matting on the floor, extra pads that can be stacked, and a supportive network of families, Azad’s is known for reaching out, from collecting food at holidays for needy families to free classes for individual protection.

Peter Rietz said students and families have been dropping off water, food, blankets and pillows. Nearby Ray’s Liquors brought over bottled water.

He wasn’t sure how many people could turn up at the school as other shelters fill up and close.

“We have bathrooms, a playroom and TV for kids. It’s OK for them to come over and burn off some energy. People were bringing in toys, coloring books. We have Legos.

“The one great thing about the school’s diverse cross section of people from Chico and Master Azad’s great connections is that everyone helps. The support from the community, from our families has been overwhelming.”

Reitz said that a rep from the city came out to check if the 313 Walnut Ave. facility was appropriate, and school was cancelled for Monday and Tuesday.

“All we need is for people to know about us.”

Terry Horne, who is the treasurer of the Chico Elks Lodge, said Monday morning there were about 75 at the building, and he expected more.

Both he and the evacuees were appreciative of the outpouring.

“It really has been amazing.”

Contact Laura Urseny at 896-7756, email lurseny@chicoer.com or on Twitter [@LauraUrseny](https://twitter.com/LauraUrseny).

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