

Residents cautioned over damaged homes

BY PEGGY SPELLMAN HOEY

Mastic Beach officials on Tuesday warned residents about the dangers of turning on the electricity at homes damaged by saltwater and fuel oil during Superstorm Sandy.

Hundreds of homes in the storm surge area took on seawater when the combination of a high tide with a full moon during the storm drove 15-foot waves inland, flooding much of the village's waterfront. The force of the surge was so powerful that outdoor fuel tanks overturned and emptied into the floodwater, later seeping into homes as the water receded into Narrow Bay.

Over 100 homes were flagged with red placards designating they are uninhabitable due to the amount of water they took on and the damage they sustained. The color designation — set by state emergency management teams — also indicates the homes are likely beyond repair.

"These are the homes you cannot return to," said trustee Gail Capiello Tuesday at the firehouse during the village's first public meeting since the hurricane. "It's dangerous until they are repaired or taken down. These houses are in very bad shape. Some of them, most of them, will come down."

Workers designated 176 homes with yellow placards, indicating they took on water, but the power cannot be turned back on without the recertification of a licensed electrician.

Mayor Bill Biondi, a former fire department chief, told residents that if their house was touched by water, whether it was a receptacle, an outside swimming pool, or an electrical line going out to the docks, the wires and circuit breakers have to be changed.

"Over time, the saltwater is going to corrode that wire," he said, adding, the situation might not present an im-

mediate problem, but "it's going to have to be certified by a licensed electrician, just for your own safety."

Capiello confided the electricity at her home in Osprey Park, which was designated with a yellow placard and located in one of the areas left underwater from the storm surge, cannot be turned back on until the wiring is redone, because it was under saltwater.

"It's very dangerous," she said.

Roughly 300 homes were given the 'go' sign — green placards — indicating residents can return home to live.

But for those facing dangerous living situations, Capiello asked them to place themselves on a list for temporary housing offered by Suffolk County.

"I'm not sure how many people need temporary housing but at least get on the list so we can find some place in the village for you to stay," she said.

Trustee Gary Stiriz, who is the commissioner of public works, described the road cleanup effort as a Herculean effort. He said the village has collected 4,600 yards of trees and has had 43 dumpsters of storm debris hauled away since the storm. Collections were halted for a week to allow residents time to gather all of their storm-related debris and place it at the curb, but the village will have crews back out there picking up debris next week.

He said much of the debris has to be separated, particularly treated lumber, piles of seaweed, and phragmites if they have been contaminated by oil.

"Most of the oil tanks on the waterfront flipped over during the high tide creating a monstrous situation as if we had a 10,000 or 15,000 gallon oil spill in the village," he said. "Some of the neighborhoods are completely inundated, as are the homes that got penetrated by the water with that oil, so not only are those homes filled with mud and sewage, but with oil, so that is why some of these houses are just absolutely devastated."

Resident Oliver Warren, one of the dozen-or-so residents who turned out to thank the village board for helping residents even when they were displaced themselves, credited them for getting the streets cleaned so quickly, describing it as "unbelievably fast," given the circumstances.

"I was here the day after the storm and it was like going through a maze," he said. "You had to backtrack, but the next day it was gone."

"I lost a house, I lost three cars, but I am still proud to be here," he said.

In other village news:

- The village board declared 87 Hemlock Dr., a home shuttered for code violations prior to the hurricane, unsafe for habitation and voted in favor of its demolition. The cost of the demolition will be charged to the owner of the premises.
- The village's next meeting will be held at the firehouse on Dec. 17 at 7 p.m.
- A group of Hurricane Katrina survivors will be giving out supplies at Osprey Park this Sunday at noon.
- Mormon Helping Hands, volunteers from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are available to assist residents with cutting fallen trees and removing debris — drywall, insulation, flooring, furniture and appliances. The group can also assist with placing tarps on the roofs of residences that need to be protected from the elements. The service will be available until Dec. 22. Priority will be given to senior citizens, first responders and others with special needs.

The work is free of charge and the volunteers will provide the tools and equipment necessary to complete the work. To request assistance, call 347-709-0438. When leaving a message, leave your name, phone number, address and a description of the damage. ■

Donations pour in for Sandy victims

BY PEGGY SPELLMAN HOEY

Mastic Beach officials have been inundated with donations to help area residents displaced by Superstorm Sandy two weeks ago, so much so they are asking well-wishers to make monetary donations or purchase gift cards so goods can be purchased individually.

"We are really bursting at the seams right now," said Aida Dankowski, a three-year volunteer for St. Jude R.C. Church Parish Outreach who is organizing an online donation relief effort. The group has raised \$2,355 out of their \$25,000 goal online at Gofundme.com, and they are asking that gift cards be purchased so families can purchase food or goods from stores such as Home Depot to help them with repairs while church officials — along with other houses of worship and nonprofits — sort out the storage issue.

The village of Mastic Beach — only a year-and-a-half-old with limited office space — also served as a staging point for donation collections at the town of Brookhaven's nutrition center on Neighborhood Road. But while space was not a problem, logistics were for the fledgling village, which still must tackle a multitude of storm-related issues including a massive cleanup and remediation. Mayor Bill Biondi ordered the nutrition center shut down Tuesday afternoon so that officials could get back to running the village. He said the remainder of goods collected were transferred over to William Paca Middle School and St. Jude's for distribution.

Dankowski said the parish would continue on business as usual; it's just that finding room might be a problem.

"We are trying to figure out where to put what; we're trying to find rooms," she said. "We have anything and everything that we can ever ask for. I have never seen this much before."

But it's not only locally that donations are being doled out to the needy.

East Patchogue native Crystal Gajewski of Ski's Open Heart Foundation — named after her father, Mark, a Ground Zero relief worker who died of cancer last year

— has joined with the Blue Point-based Johnny Mac Foundation, another nonprofit set up to aid the victims of 9/11, to collect donations for Sandy's victims across the state.

Gajewski said the two groups have organized several drop-off points for people to make donations and managed to send off at least three truckloads of goods to the Brooklyn and Queens areas, as well as helicopter delivery up-island. For now, organizations are making gift cards their priority, but they are also looking for blankets, sheets, animal food, underwear, socks, cleaning supplies, garbage bags, candles and batteries.

The organization, which has not stopped collecting donations of non-perishable foods and clothing, is also seeking unwrapped toys and school supplies for children, as well as books.

Gajewski, 29, said the organizations are going to focus on their Sandy efforts until the need subsists.

"We put this together to help other families in need," she said.

Corporations are also deep in the throes of collecting donations.

Prudential Douglas Elliman employees organized a fund-raising drive over at their Ronkonkoma office, utilizing the space as a staging point for the community drop-off donations. Since the onset of the storm, the group has also been able to funnel donations out of Ronkonkoma with the help of donated trucks and helicopters, delivering donations to Port Washington as well as locally to the Mastic/Shirley area, said Mike McLean, the agency's director of relocation.

"We've probably been there four or five times," he said. "We hope to get back there this Wednesday and Thursday."

Once the 'Sandy' crisis is over, Dankowski said volunteers have another looming concern as more victims get on their feet and the holiday season approaches.

"It's on regular days without storms that we have about 400 families a month," she said. "Now, we have double that because there are some [families] who ordinarily do not need our services [that now] need them." ■

To make a donation:

• **Monetary donations to St. Jude R.C. Church Parish Outreach can be made online at www.gofundme.com/stjudeoutreach. Checks and gift cards can also be mailed to St. Jude R.C. Church Parish Outreach, 89 Overlook Drive, Mastic Beach, NY 11951. For more information, call 281-5634.**

• **Ski's Open Heart Foundation and the Johnny Mac Foundation are collecting donations at the following drop-off locations:**

• **Canz-a-City Roadhouse, 388 Medford Ave., Patchogue**

• **South Country Ambulance, corner of Montauk Highway and Dunton Avenue in East Patchogue, Friday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Ask for a volunteer at the station to direct you to where to leave your donation.**

• **13 Homan Ave., Blue Point**

• **262 Martha Ave., East Patchogue**

Monetary donations can also be made to the foundations' websites via Paypal. For more information visit www.skisopenheartfoundation.org and www.johnnymacfoundation.org or email jennifer.mcnamara@johnnymacfoundation.org or info@skisopenheart.com.

• **Brookhaven Town Human Services Division is collecting donations of: towels, diapers, cleaning supplies, yard tools, masks, gloves, storm supplies, baby items, toiletries, pet supplies, clean blankets, batteries, hand-warmers, water, non-perishable foods, board games, crayons, coloring books and toys. Town Hall located at One Independence Hill in Farmingville is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 pm. For more information, call 451-6600 or go to the town's website at www.brookhaven.org.**

• **Prudential Douglas Elliman has set aside space at its Ronkonkoma office for donations to Sandy victims. The office is located at 4949 Expressway Drive North, Ronkonkoma. For more information, call 585-8500.**