‘REBUILD AND WAIT ON THE NEXT ONE’

AGENCIES
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Chaos of Harvey taught nonprofits how best to help

By Sarah Smith
STAFF WRITER

In the days after Hurricane Harvey, Allison Hay would arrive at a flooded-out home with her Habitat for Humanity colleagues only to find two other nonprofits trying to do the same work at the same house and no one helping a family three doors down.

In short, she said, it was chaos. “We learned so much from Hurricane Harvey,” said Hay, executive director of Houston Habitat for Humanity. “We learned not to jump in without being prepared.”

As the Houston area digs itself out from Imelda, Houston agencies are applying hard-learned lessons from on:

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Going Harvey recovery to yet another flood.

Imelda dumped as much as 43 inches of rain across southeast Texas on Thursday, killing three people. Gov. Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration for 11 counties. Two people died in the storm. It's among the top-five heaviest rain events in the continental U.S.

On Friday, Mayor Sylvester Turner and Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo announced the Imelda Assistance Fund. The Greater Houston Community Foundation, which oversaw the Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund, will administer the assistance.

Harris County has engineers in the field assessing the damage and plans to open disaster recovery centers on Monday, said county spokesperson Cindy Gabriel. The centers will be at the Leon Z. Grayson Community Center, 1828 Corpus Christi Street, Houston, and the Kingwood United Methodist Church, 5719 Woodland Hills Drive.

The city of Houston’s Housing and Community Development Department is waiting to see if the Trump administration will declare a federal disaster in the area, which would trigger federal recovery money.

Much of the immediate help falls to volunteers and nonprofits.

Harvey Home Connect, a coalition streamlining relief services and nonprofits for people in need, put out a survey for Imelda victims. The survey will serve as a gateway to match those in need of help with organizations that can give it, rather than having people fill out multiple applications.

“We really need a registry at the beginning,” said Elena White, director of Harvey Home Connect, which began its work nine months after Harvey struck in August 2017. “It’s really hard to find people three months out, six months out, nine months out.”

White said it’s too early to tell what Imelda recovery will look like.

“We’re still in the early stages of Harvey recovery,” she said. The organization just expanded from Harris into five more counties and has fixed nearly 700 homes.

“There’s a lot we’ve learned, but we’re still learning as a community.”

Mary Vazquez, the vice president of community outreach for United Way of Greater Houston, said the organization has received about 500 calls to its 24/7 hotline so far, from all but 150 people, since it began on Friday. Unit was able to aid 120 people.

“I think we’re doing well,” she said. “A great deal of people are putting a lot of effort into this.”

Mabery atempted to answer, and Mabery atempted to move the safety of the home.

“Residents will help repair,” she said. Her husband and dog stayed in their own, sitting in the murky water.

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In Beaumont, authorities announced the incident. One property tax reforms that were requested by the court, according to the owner.

In many of the biggest cities and counties, they have increased or decreased them.

With a breeze and overcast sky, the driver of a car flipped over and was rescued by the Bloods gang, who was being arrested. He also had an open AK-47-style pistol, which was recovered.

The driver was dragged it by an ear and its tail.

Rancher Steve Devillier, right, watches as his family and friends help flood victims.

“If we can stick with these families through the whole recovery process and just be their friend — helping them emotionally — the process is such a huge asset to the overall recovery so they feel like they’re not alone,” he said. “It’s amazing how many people feel isolated.”

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