One-stop center opens

More than 130 families displaced by brush fires have come for financial and other support, relief officials say.

Joshua Pelzer
Claremont-Upland Voice

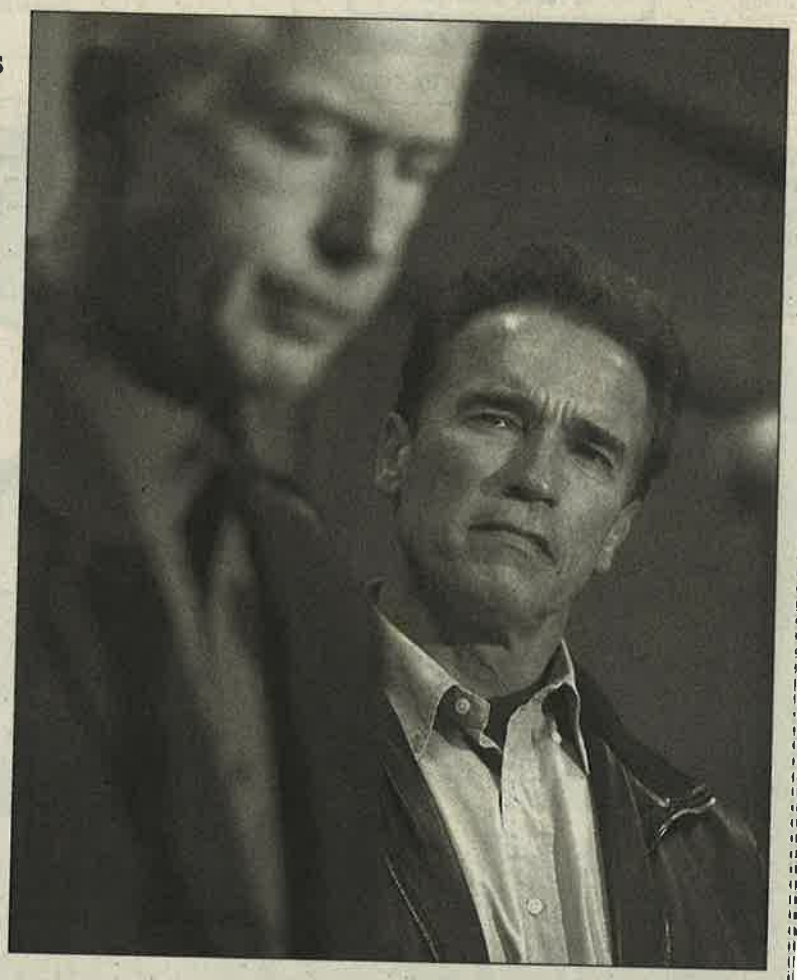
CLAREMONT — Ron Termeforoosh saw the flames consume his house as he and his family ran to safety. But more than a week later he can still hardly believe it's gone.

"Everyday is one day at a time, and I'm slowly realizing it really did happen because it's still a shock to me and the whole family," he said. "Pretty much our whole life that we started was there and everything that we owned and had was just about there . . . It's hard to really sit and talk about and think about."

Joseph Fogler, 82, and his fiancée, Jana Miller, 52, were left with almost nothing but the clothes on their back and their dog, Mugzy, after losing their home in the San Antonio Heights neighborhood near Upland.

"We have to have housing [because] it's kind of difficult to sleep in a dormitory on a cot with about 30 other people sleeping there," Fogler said recalling their stay at a Red Cross shelter. "I would say conservatively in five days we might have had 15 hours total sleep."

Those were just a few of the stories that recently brought fire victims to the One Stop Disaster Assistance Center in Claremont.



Schwarzenegger listens to Gov. Gray Davis during a press conference for the opening of the one-stop center.

The center is one of six throughout the area where victims can go to obtain low-interest federal loans, meals, counseling, food and clothing, rental assistance and health care.

More than 130 families have visited the center since it opened more than a week ago, said Dick

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Guthrie, director of human services for Claremont.

"There is certainly a range of emotion," Guthrie said. "There are folks who have very quickly sprung into action, taken stock of their loss and are working with the appropriate insurance agencies and there are others where the shock is still there and you can tell that they still have a heavy load on their shoulders."

Guthrie said the center would stay open as long as necessary, but workers will be deployed to other centers when needed.

"The tone is certainly one of being really conscious that people have gone through both a tremendous emotional and physical loss and we've tried to be positive and thoughtful in terms of making sure people feel supported and cared about," he said.

The Red Cross workers are also at the center to fill in the gaps with services until more substantial help can be obtained.

"Our main function is to get them through the first 10 days to two weeks after the event until they can kind of get back on an even keel or give some of these programs that take longer to go into effect a little more time," said Mike Conley, executive director for the Claremont Chapter of the Red Cross.

Gov. Gray Davis and Gov.-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger toured the center at its opening, visited with victims and aid workers and promised financial support.

"They have no homes; their dreams went up in smoke; the least we can do is put a check in their hands to help put them back on their feet," Davis said of the victims.

The governor estimated that fire damage cost the state $2 billion in property and infrastructure damage, firefighting, and reimbursements to states that contributed resources and other expenses. He added that more than 5,400 people have applied for state disaster relief.

Schwarzenegger pledged to continue the push for federal funds including federal support for dead tree removal — a major cause of brush fires.

"The generosity that I've seen here has been poured out and it really makes me proud to be a Californian," he said. "The average person out there that maybe has very little themselves shares and gives and that's what we have seen in the last few days."

■ The center is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Friday and from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday at the Alexander Hughes Community Center, 1700 Danbury Rd. For more information, call 399-5490.