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Evicted renters find a city of friends in Largo

By Demorris A. Lee, Times Staff Writer
In print: Friday, October 10, 2008

LARGO — Debbie Wisniewski heard about the plight of the nine families at the No Go Largo Village mobile home park and had to find a way to help.

So Wisniewski and her husband, Pete, the owners of Direct Buy of Pinellas, donated the truck that helped the families move from the park on Clearwater-Largo Road that had been deemed unlivable because of a water shutoff.

In addition, Debbie Wisniewski spent Thursday morning at the park helping the residents pack boxes and load the truck.

"The main thing is the sense of community," said Wisniewski, 52. "We are all here and in this together, especially in these economic times that we are in."

Largo code enforcement officials Wednesday ruled the mobile homes were uninhabitable without water, which was shut off Sept. 30 after the park owner failed to pay an \$8,400 bill.

The city of Largo, local nonprofit organizations and area residents banded together to provide temporary housing and other assistance for the 18 adults and 16 children.

"It's the first time we've had to mobilize so many resources so quickly," said Jonathan E. Evans, an assistant to Largo's city manager. "Everyone has worked hand in hand and it's almost a model of how government and other organizations can work together for the betterment of the community."

Three families have secured permanent housing and one family made other arrangements for temporary lodging. The other five families are staying at InTown Suites in Clearwater for the next week, with Catholic Charities picking up the tab.

Catholic Charities also is continuing to help them find permanent homes.

Direct Buy donated a truck and several of its workers donated their time to help load them. Largo Self Storage donated storage services, the Salvation Army chipped in free bus passes and some county residents donated cash.

"I figured I'd come help," said Jimmy Henderson, 25, of Pasco County who was reluctant to give his name because he wasn't seeking recognition for the

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Robert Burns helps fellow No Go Largo Village park resident Arris Williams, who is not in this picture, carry his things to a truck. Volunteers and officials made sure the residents had shelter and other aid.

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help. "It's like a karma thing for me. When I'm in need, somebody might come and help me."

Selena Vesey, 25, is seven months pregnant and had just moved in the park three weeks ago. Wednesday night, Catholic Charities threw her a baby shower. She received a stroller, and lots of diapers and clothes.

"I'm surprised at the amount of help we've received," Vesey said. "I'm thankful for it because being pregnant, I don't know what I would do."

The water was disconnected because the park owner, Key Largo Communities Corp., had not paid the utility bill since July 25, according to Pinellas County Utilities. There are about 60 homes in the park but only eight were being rented.

Neither Andrea Trani, president of Key Largo Communities, nor her partner Helene Provenzano, could be reached for comment Thursday.

Rebecca Rader had lived at the park for five years and was filled with emotion Thursday morning as she watched volunteers load her belongings on a truck.

"We are so tired we couldn't sleep," Rader said. "It must be God keeping us going. I'm trying not to cry. I'm so trying not to cry."

Then she cried.

Staff Photographer Jim Damaske contributed to this story.

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Bragington Oaks mobile home park, also owned by Key Largo Communities, remains in danger of having its water cut off, too. Key Largo Communities president Andrea Trani had arranged with Pinellas County Utilities to pay \$2,500 of the \$6,079 owed on the water bill by the end of the day Thursday. But Trani had not paid the bill by 5 p.m., utility officials said.

There are six occupied units at Bragington, 810 16th Ave. NW. Micki Gates, assistant director of customer service for the Pinellas County Utilities has agreed to give the city of Largo as much notice as needed before shutting the water off at the park.

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To help

To help residents of No Go Largo Village, call Jonathan E. Evans, Largo's assistant to the city manager, at (727) 587-6727.

[Last modified: Oct 15, 2008 07:20 PM]

Comments on this article

by Cindy **Oct 15, 2008 7:20 PM**

This is a good story and glad to see people helping like Debbie, DirectBuy, Catholic Charities, and Largo Self Storage.

by Bob **Oct 12, 2008 6:55 PM**

Interesting, 60 homes in the park, only 6 rented. I have to wonder why. Perhaps this is one way to "clear out the park" so it can be sold.

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