

Residents aid Armenian relief efforts

By Tim Smith
staff writer

Farmington-area residents can contribute to a care package that Southfield is putting together for Soviet Armenia.

That help for the earthquake-stricken Soviet republic is coming in many different forms. Some are pledging money, for essential medical supplies; others are carting over-stuffed plastic bags of used or new clothing to various relief stations in Southfield.

Meanwhile, the city flag at Farmington Hills City Hall flew at half-staff Wednesday in memory of the tens of thousands of people who died in the earthquake in Soviet Armenia Dec. 7.

"It occurred to me that it would be nice, although not terribly helpful, if we flew the city flag at half-mast in honor of those who died in the earthquake," Farmington Hills Mayor Jody Soronen said in gaining council support Monday night.

"It certainly is a tragedy they'll be a long time recuperating from."

The public's generosity since last week's disaster, which reportedly left 89,000 dead and 600,000 homeless, has buoyed leaders of Southfield's two Armenian churches, which serve the Farmington area.



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Harry H. Kelch is treasurer of the finance committee for the relief effort. The Farmington Hills resident totals donations aimed at Armenia.

"We're gratified to both churches and synagogues for mentioning us (at services), praying for us and encouraging their congregations to help," said the Rev. Paven Avedikian of St. John's. "We're already seeing the results of that."

Armenian Congregational Church pastor Vahan Tootikian said he is "touching to see so many people respond." The church is linking up with Channel 7 and Lawrence Institute of Technology in relief efforts. LIT president Richard Marburger and his wife, Mary, are members of Tootikian's congregation.

"THE ARMENIAN people are very proud people," Tootikian said. They are givers, not receivers. But this is one time I would appeal to the world to be generous — and they are."

It was hoped that the generosity would be stretched over the long term, said LIT's Marburger. "I'd like to think this is more than the Christmas spirit."

U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, D-Southfield, was among those calling for Americans to "reach out to our brothers and sisters in Soviet Armenia and help them in this time of terrible need."

"The devastation caused by the earthquake in Soviet Armenia is so monstrous that it will be days, perhaps weeks, before we know the full extent of the disaster," Levin said in a statement.

"But we already know that the death toll will be in the tens of thousands, and that the survivors are in desperate need of shelter, medical supplies, clothing and blood. As our hearts go out to the victims, let us also join in the worldwide effort to ease their pain."

PLENTY IS being done in the short term for the earthquake-rocked mountainous region of the Soviet Union, and it was evident at St. John's.

Monday afternoon, volunteers there were preparing letters for 2,700 metropolitan Detroit Armenians asking for donations, whether members of St. John's or not.

Meanwhile, goods continued to

pour into the Northwestern Highway church, which includes 1,300 families in its parish.

Workers separated new and used clothing; labels were covered with teddy bears and men's suits; blankets, still covered in plastic wrap, were stacked on the cement floor.

ONE PARISHIONER, who knows someone who runs a South Carolina clothing business, notified Avedikian Monday about the donation of 3,000 pairs of socks, which soon will be shipped overseas.

Although goods are welcome, St. John's volunteer Anoush Papelian said cash donations are the quickest and simplest way to help Soviet Armenia, which had three cities damaged or destroyed in the quake.

To rectify that destruction, Avedikian estimated it would cost at least \$30 billion.

"Cash is easier," Papelian said.

City supports choice on garbage millage

The Farmington City Council is supporting state legislation that would allow more special tax millage for solid waste services.

Currently set at 3 mills, House Bill 5581 would allow an additional 3 mills, subject to voter approval.

"I don't know if local millage will be used (for solid waste services),"

"They'll be able to buy in quantity what they need, in terms of medical supplies and building equipment."

Six telephones were installed Monday at St. John's, to take public pledges.

"Money can reach overnight, and we can also mail medical supplies," said the Congregational Church's Tootikian, who said his phone has been ringing constantly since the disaster.

THOUGH GOODS and pledges were also rolling in at LIT, Marburger said the college's main involvement is to give people information about how they can give whatever they can.

Marburger also said LIT students are caught up in the relief effort, making individual pleas for donations in their classrooms and churches.

The donations should "add up to

something wonderful," Marburger said. But he emphasized that the giving should not be a one-shot deal.

"We need to carry this campaigning on for a while," said Marburger, whose wife is of Armenian descent. "The immediate response is to keep people alive. But we need continuing response to help (Soviet Armenia) rebuild."

Agreeing is Tootikian, who said people will be in need long after the holiday season ends.

"Long-term relief is something that's needed, too. I hope it isn't forgotten," Tootikian said.

AVEDIKIAN, WHO is coordinator of Armenia Earthquake Fund, is making an appeal to the medical community. Through the fund, money will be directly deposited for medical supplies.

"There will be a need for medical equipment for months, even years.

Many people have lost their kidneys," said Avedikian, adding that Soviet Armenia now has only one dialysis machine. "We will even accept used ones."

Meanwhile, Tootikian said he knows of "non-Armenian doctors who are ready to drop everything and go" to the Soviet republic.

On a much smaller level, similar sacrifices are being made by non-Armenian metro Detroiters, said St. John's volunteer Papelian.

Dragging two kids along, a woman brought a bag of children's clothing to the church Monday morning, Papelian said.

And a 13-year-old girl donated \$150 from money she received at her own bat mitzvah, the volunteer added.

Staff writer Bob Sklar contributed to this report.

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