

The remains of San Leon

Couple brings care packages to those devastated by storm in coastal town

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SAN LEON – Florence Darke stood shaking in the parking lot, wiping tears from her eyes.

Nicky, the stray dog she rescued long ago, brushed Darke’s leg to comfort the 78-year-old woman. She can’t afford to stay in a hotel anymore.

“I’m going home,” she told Dierdre Mullins, who brought her food and water from Victoria.

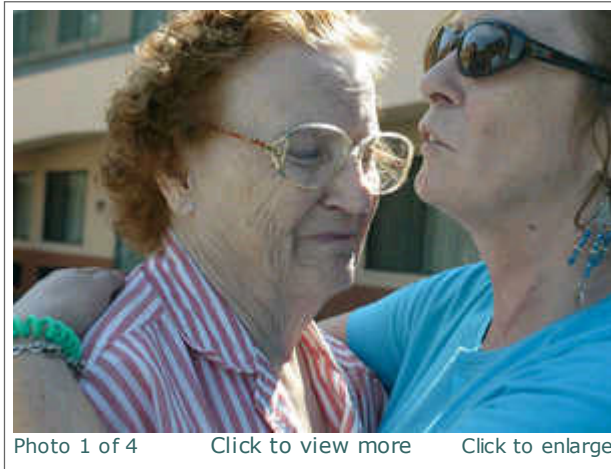


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Darke feels more afraid staying in a hotel than on a post-Hurricane Ike peninsula. She has lived in San Leon since 1980.

Her friends warned she might not have a healthy mobile home anymore. Darke brushed off the comment and shut the trunk of her supply-packed car.

Mullins and her fiance, Chris Fraley, loaded groceries into their sport utility vehicle to distribute south of Houston on Wednesday. Victoria residents and businesses donated supplies for the couple to take to those hit hardest by Ike.

The couple evacuated from Clear Lake to stay in Victoria, but couldn’t let their neighbors go without and started making trips around Galveston County every other day.

They loaded groceries into the car of friends Dallas Hurt and Deborah Roeber.

“I think it’s a blessing that they came,” Roeber said. “Everybody’s in need. We’ll use anything because you got to make it.”

The husband and wife were staying at the Executive Inn and Suites in Bacliff, where the homesick Darke won’t stay anymore.

They couldn’t bear to tell what awaited Darke in San Leon.

“Some places look like a natural gas explosion,” Hurt, a 53-year-old who owns the Bacliff Clock Co., said. “Just totally blown apart.”

Hurt and Roeber, a 52-year-old real estate agent, are trying to see as little of the damage as possible. The water even reached their raised home, which stood 13-and-a-half feet above sea level.

“It just hurts you inside,” Roeber said. “You get down there. It’s going to bring tears to your eyes.”

The couple moved to the coast from San Antonio five years ago because they liked the tranquility of coastal living. They plan on sticking around as they now have businesses established.

After stopping in League City and then Bacliff to unload supplies, Fraley and Mullins toured the destruction in San Leon, which had almost 4,400 residents, according to the 2000 census. Fraley used to visit three times a week to fish.

Brush and wood debris from homes lined the streets, waiting for pickup. Toys and furniture littered the yards. Some folks began trying to live in their homes again, hand-washing their clothes and hanging them on a line to dry.

Sailboats and motorboats adorned yards like lawn ornaments.

Between Sixth and Seventh streets, a huge ferry boat covered the backyard of a home on the water. Around the corner, what used to be the Buccaneer Bar and Grill fell down sideways. Yellow tape outlined the property.

The owner sat in his pickup across the street staring at the property. Mark Foster, 55, just bought the restaurant at the San Leon Marina six months ago as part of his retirement.

He also bought the ferry boat, which was built in 1926 and used in New Orleans. He had hoped to turn it into a bar and grill with an opening date scheduled in two weeks. Ike “devastated” his house three blocks away.

“Looks like I can’t retire,” Foster said.

He came on Wednesday to start pulling boards and pilings. Having lived there all his life, he plans to tear down and rebuild. He even serves as the Galveston County Justice of the Peace in Precinct 7.

Foster wouldn’t trade living on the coast, even though he’s seen hurricanes Carla and Alicia, and Tropical Storm Allison. His El Campo relatives brought him food, water and even generators.

“It’s just something you have to put up with,” Foster said. “Once you live here, there’s no place like it. Hurricane or no hurricane.”

How to help

If you would like to donate supplies for Dierdre Mullins to take to Galveston County, drop them off at the Parkway Baptist Church. Call Mullins at 281-781-6206.

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