

Furniture Assist Provides Help After Devastating Fire

By PEGGY A. ROTHBAUM, Ph.D.

The May 5 six-alarm fire at Ferraro's restaurant, with almost 20 fire departments responding, was devastating. Our hearts go out to Ferraro's and other businesses affected by the fire.

Three apartments were home to five people and three dogs. The community, including the American Red Cross Tri-County Chapter, Overlook Hospital, Westfield Inn, veterinarians, The Office, police, town residents and others, aided human and animal residents. We, at Furniture Assist, Inc., are thankful that we were able to give back to Westfield, whose residents are so generous to our organization.

Greg Kasko was on his way home from work when he saw flashing lights and the aftermath of the fire. "As a retired police officer, I know all too well the devastation that fire can cause. The one part of my job as an officer that I thoroughly enjoyed was helping out others in need." When Greg told his daughters about the little girl who lost everything, they wanted to raise money for her and her family. They later raised more to include another resident, Denis Kelly, in their efforts.

Greg immediately contacted Kassie Smith, with Furniture Assist for about four years and currently serving as treasurer. Greg, who played softball with Kassie's husband, lends Kassie his trailer for neighbors to donate items to Furniture Assist. Greg asked Kassie to help Denis, who lost most of his possessions in the fire. Furniture Assist gave Denis rugs, a desk chair, mattress, pictures, toaster oven, towels, a comforter, coffee

table, end tables, curtain rods and other items, to make his new apartment feel like home again.

Denis Kelly wants everyone to know how grateful he is, particularly to Greg and Kassie. "A big thank you for helping me, a complete stranger, get on my feet again," he says. "This is a bad predicament, and over time, it makes things easier to deal with and lightens the load of having to start over. It is hard now, but in time, I know that I will be okay.

"I am more than appreciative for the help of the fire departments, police and Westfield community and their continuing generosity."

Furniture Assist, Inc. (www.furnitureassist.com) is a 501(c)3 organization serving working people in Northern New Jersey. It was founded in 2004 by Dawson Yeomans, a retired computer systems analyst, who serves as president. Donations range from single items to contents of entire houses. We receive items from hotels, storage facilities, stores, residential complexes and other businesses, as well as from individuals. Financial donations are also appreciated.

About 70 social agencies and other non-profits screen and refer clients who come to receive items for free. We have helped hundreds of fire victims. We are a totally volunteer organization and welcome new volunteers. We are grateful for the generosity of many Westfield organizations and individuals, and are thankful that we were able to give back to Westfield in this time of need.

Peggy A. Rothbaum is a trustee of Furniture Assist, Inc.

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TOUCHES OF HOME... Pictured above is a sampling of the items provided by Furniture Assist, Inc. to working people in need. Among the recent recipients was a Westfield resident who lost most of his possessions in the Ferraro's restaurant fire. The organization accepts donations ranging from single items to the contents of entire houses. For more information about Furniture Assist, Inc., visit furnitureassist.com.