

Rebuilding Together, others helping out at an alarming rate

Rebuilding Together, others come together to give away free smoke alarms, food, garden boxes



Rebuilding Together volunteers load crates of food into the back of a truck to be delivered to residents of Vallejo Mobile Estates on Saturday. Food delivery is part of a three-part program of services offered to low-income veterans, seniors, the disabled, and other low-income residents of Solano County. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)
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Over 150 residents at the Vallejo Mobile Home Estates can sleep a little more soundly thanks to the work and donations of Rebuilding Together Solano County.

The organization teamed up with the Vallejo Fire Department, Travis Air Force Base, Painters Union Local 376, Valero and Community Presbyterian Church to deliver free food, free smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms and garden boxes at the venue on Saturday morning. The venue is one of four mobile home parks in Vallejo that Solano County provides services to, along with the Carquinez Highlands, the Vallejo Bay Mobile Home Community on Broadway and Olympia of Vallejo LLC. Rebuilding Together also helps out facilities in Fairfield and Vacaville.

Rebuilding Together Executive Director Elizabeth Hoffman said the community involvement never gets old.

"I get to wake up and hopefully change one person's life and that gets me very excited," Hoffman said. "Now, there are days when my back does hurt from carrying all the equipment and supplies, but just knowing that you are helping somebody feels great and for me it helps make the world go round." Since 2009 Rebuilding Together has partnered with more than 12,000 community volunteers to provide home rehab services. Since 2009 the organization has installed 1,600 carbon monoxide alarms and 3,200 smoke alarms to low-income mobile home parks.

"Back when we started this we wanted to focus on helping low-income residents such as veterans, seniors and the disabled," Hoffman said. "We realized that many of those people live in mobile home parks so that's why we target those areas often."

The Saturday event featured approximately 30 volunteers, including Robert Myers from Painters Union Local 376, who brought his wife, his daughter and his own supplies to help.

"It's been nice as we get a lot of people who say, 'Thank you' to us," Myers said. "Most people are asking how to turn the smoke alarms off once they go off and want to know about the testing check dates. It feels great to help out."

Each group that went out to a residential unit had at least one Vallejo firefighter with them, including

Chris Balmer and Veronica Hernandez.

"We bring fire awareness pamphlets to them and try to provide a brief overview of the difference between fires in the living area and the kitchen areas of homes," Balmer said. "But the people are very thankful."

"All the residents are very appreciative and have good questions such as how to replace a smoke alarm once it goes off. One person told us they just threw their smoke alarm away after it went off, which is not what we want," Hernandez said, with a chuckle.

Karla Parra and Jada Meddley were on hand from Travis Air Force Base to help out.

"We're giving back to the community. We get a lot of support, so we like to give back some support," said Parra. In 2021 Rebuilding Together distributed more than 650,000 pounds of food as part of Feeding America/Food Bank of Solano Contra Costa County.

"It's nice seeing some smiles when we come to the door," Meddley said. "We're relieving a lot of stress from them as grocery prices have increased."

Debra Oldehoeft was helping out courtesy of Valero for the first time. "I've worked with a couple of people who've always volunteered and I asked about working and thankfully I was able to make this weekend and help out," Oldehoeft said. "Although there aren't a lot of long conversations, people are really happy when we come to their door."

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