

Ocean Ridge Charities Association, Inc.

by Kath Larson



OCEAN RIDGE CHARITIES ASSOCIATION FOCUSES FUNDRAISING INWARD AFTER DEVASTATING TORNADO OF FEBRUARY 15, 2021

As the Ocean Ridge community continues to move forward, Ocean Ridge Charities Association (ORCA) wants to extend our sincere “**THANK YOU**” to all of you who have done so much over the last few months for our neighbors. So many of you donated money, time, cleanup efforts, and support to the families affected by the unprecedented tragic event in February. The money collected through the “**By Neighbors for Neighbors**” campaign was easily the largest amount we have ever collected. Your love was overwhelming. In addition, the funds from the “**Go Fund Me**” page added to what we could do for our neighbors. Ocean Ridge Charities Association was honored to be able to help distribute those funds back to our neighbors and help to ease a little of the trauma they were experiencing. The devastating tornado on the evening of February 15, 2021, impacted all of us in Ocean Ridge, whether or not our loved ones were lost or our homes were damaged. The entire community suffered and, in typical Ocean Ridge fashion, the community immediately banded together to begin the long journey forward.

On February 16, 2021, Donna Ciliberto, President of ORMA, requested that Ocean Ridge Charities Association accept the management of the outpouring of funds that had begun to arrive on her doorstep that morning. In addition, CAMs set up a “Go Fund Me” page for those impacted by the tornado. Control of the money generated by this page was turned over to ORCA. An ORMA/ORCA partnership began on that evening. ORCA has not traditionally given money to individuals, but we knew we needed to help our neighbors. We initiated our first ever formal “By Neighbors for Neighbors” campaign, which began that Friday afternoon. The com-

munity was asked to place their donations into one of three boxes in the community. By Sunday evening, one box had collected over \$10,000. That evening, a team of ORMA and ORCA representatives met via Zoom to discuss distribution. We decided on a strategy and levels of assistance based on confidential information we had been given. As soon as our meeting was over, there was an urgent request for assistance by one of our impacted families. We responded with financial help immediately.

On Monday morning, February 22, 2021, ORCA set up a table at the Plantation Club to begin distributing money to those impacted by the tornado. This resulted in several days of distribution to all who came in. All were encouraged to share their experience with their neighbors in the affected areas. Assistance was freely offered to all. Several weeks later, ORCA was able to access the funds from the Go Fund Me account (\$46,000) and along with the funds (\$95,000) collected internally, began the second and final distribution. Having been in the position of helping others in the past, this role reversal of receiving help was difficult for many. So we began to refer to these donations as “**hugs from your neighbors**”, which was exactly what they were.

During that time, ORCA received donations from neighbors, former neighbors, families of neighbors, other neighboring communities, multiple local businesses (in the form of gift cards), many of our Corporate Sponsors, and individuals and groups from all over Brunswick County. The outpouring of support was indeed heartwarming. Our community had suffered so

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greatly and others knew that and reached out to us. With the tremendous amount of money raised, we knew our distributions would provide some assistance to the over 120 families impacted.

On June 4, 2021, the Social Activities Committee and ORCA hosted a pizza luncheon for about 50 of those directly impacted by the damage of the tornado. The event was facilitated by Liz Weinhold, OR resident and certified trauma therapist. Her technical expertise and sincere words provided a safe place for the attendees to share successes and exchange names and numbers. There was lots of discussion, hugs, a few tears, and, most importantly, a sense of hope when the program concluded.

The Ocean Ridge Quilters decided to use this event to distribute a surprise quilt to each of the 30 families represented at the luncheon. The quilters, realizing that they couldn't create over 120 quilts for all the families, wanted to do what they could for a smaller

number. This was the type of generosity that Phyllis O'Connor, who lost her life in the tornado, always showed to others.

As background: a few days after the tornado, a quilt was found in Ash, NC. It turned out that the quilt was one made by Phyllis O'Connor, member of the OR Quilt Group and a former ORCA board member. Over the next few weeks, quilts continued to find their way back to Ocean Ridge. The remarkable, random arrival of these quilts became a small bright light during the tough days and weeks following the tornado. In all, 12 quilts came back to us. All those which were made by Phyllis were repaired and given to her family. Others will be given to Rose House, a women's rehabilitation treatment center sponsored by CRCI and supported by ORCA.

So, in the midst of the sorrow that the tornado brought to so many, the amazing, traveling quilts became a story that has now come full circle.

OCEAN RIDGE CHARITIES ASSOCIATION ASSIST NEIGHBORS IN THE OLD SHALLOTTE ROAD AREA

Following the devastation of the EF3 Tornado on February 15, 2021, to Ocean Ridge Plantation, Ocean Ridge Charities Association (ORCA) coordinated with Ocean Ridge Management Association (ORMA) to assist Ocean Ridge residents impacted by the tornado. While ORCA's initial focus was on Ocean Ridge Plantation residents, in concert with our mission, we wanted to assist our neighbors in the Old Shallotte Road area who also experienced tornado damage.

Through a generous donation of \$5,000 by the Duke Energy Foundation, ORCA was able to assist these families. We coordinated with the Brunswick County Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) who were contacting individuals in the Old Shallotte Road

area who needed assistance in varying degrees.

Some of these families had uninhabitable homes and had to move elsewhere, while others had damage and needed assistance making repairs. We also coordinated and gathered information from many Brunswick County organizations to learn what aid they were providing and then contacted each resident. Once successful, we arranged for a time and place to give families a check and gift cards and had teams go to their home or make other location arrangements. All in all, there were ten (10) families that were so grateful for ORCA's gifts to them. As our Brunswick County community knows, it will take some of these families a long time to get repairs or rebuilds completed.