

Community comes together in big storm

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News

By Kathleen Mendenhall



A gas truck arrives in Georgetown Dec. 28 via Highway 193. Photo courtesy of Alissa Cimino



Alissa Cimino held down the fort at Gas and Go in Georgetown. Photo by Ron Harris

By Kat and Marty Mendenhall

Georgetown greeted the New Year while digging out from one of the most powerful snowstorms in memory. The town has been struggling along without power and communication lines since the beginning of the week of Dec. 27 as infrastructure was damaged. Power lines and poles were down all over town and access was limited by the amount of snow.

On the morning of Dec. 27 many locals reported on social media of hearing trees so heavy with snow that branches were breaking, with cracks sounding like popcorn popping. Some reported seeing flashes of light as electrical transformers blew out. Many trees came down, blocking roadways and creating impossible transportation, even in emergency situations. It is probably safe to say there isn't a property owner on the Divide who didn't lose trees in the storm.

Firefighter Nick Cimmarusti offered to man Georgetown's fire station but the drive in wasn't easy.

“(What) normally takes me 15 minutes took hours as I had to saw a path through the debris on the roadway to get to Georgetown.”

PG&E and AT&T crews were not immediately able to assess the storm's impact to equipment as damaged areas were dangerous to workers, utility officials said.

By Jan. 3 activity was bustling around town as numerous PG&E and other utility trucks were seen around Highway 193 near the MarVal shopping center, replacing poles and downed power lines. It was some relief for many residents to see utility workers and know help was coming.

The focus of repairs began in the heart of Georgetown, getting the library, post office and bank up and running. Power was restored to most residents Jan. 5.

AT&T officials say they cannot begin repairs until downed poles are replaced by PG&E. As of press time there was no estimate from AT&T about when restoration of service might come, so the residents wait.

Many stories are coming to light of neighbor helping neighbor — doing well-checks or contacting authorities to check on the health and safety of residents. There were locations like Buckeye Trailer Park on Wentworth Springs Road that were particularly hard hit where residents barely had the basics. There have been volunteer teams looking in on those residents.

When the storm began locals like Micah Reilly and Ed Riddle offered their expertise by clearing driveways and roadways and helping with needs like food, gasoline and other heat sources. There are stories of neighborhood locals on Georgia Slide Road who plowed the road so residents could get to Highway 193.

By Dec. 28 the Gas & Go in Georgetown had seen such a run on gasoline only premium remained. A delivery was expected later that day but the road to Georgetown was questionable, leaving people wondering if the truck would make it through. Reilly and Riddle organized a convoy to escort the truck to Gas & Go.

The need to fill generators was so great the Gas & Go parking lot was often packed. Sometimes the line went out to Highway 193. But everyone was polite and willing to wait their turn and displays of kindness were regularly seen.

Alissa Cimino, owner of Gas & Go, was actively coordinating activity, supplies and information for the community. She worked with PG&E and local first responders to offer supplies.

The IOOF Hall in Georgetown served as the community distribution center. Items like blankets, batteries, food, flashlights, phone chargers and other supplies were offered. There were active donation requests for supplies on Facebook and reports of gas cards and other necessities arriving at the IOOF. Abundant expressions of thanks were heard in the IOOF Hall as people picked up supplies.

Cimino and a team of dedicated volunteers, including Ron Harris, kept busy helping all who came into the hall. Harris also went to work delivering supplies and using his expertise with his camera to document the impact of the historic storm around the Divide.

While Highway 193 has returned to the busy artery it has always been, other roads and areas are still buried in snow and only beginning to emerge. People are now coming down from up-country areas like Volcanoville and Quintette thanks to the efforts and hard work of the local community.

The emotional and mental toll of this storm and the subsequent challenges are being felt all over the Divide. Black Oak Unified School District students returned to school the week of Jan. 3 using generators for power.