



Fire victims fund growing



Stan Howe photo

Bob Gray, from Smitty's Barrie Furniture, helps Erna Brown assemble new bed frames in one of her son's rooms. Smitty's donated furniture to Brown's family, who lost everything in the Five Points fire. "They are great, wonderful people, with hearts of gold," and emotional Brown said. "We really appreciate all they've done for us, especially at Christmas time." Brown, her two sons and a roommate lost everything when their apartment above the Royal Thai restaurant was destroyed. Manager of Barrie Furniture, formerly Smitty's, Kathe Frazee, was moved to action by the plight of the Browns. "We wanted to help in any way we can. We give throughout the year, but especially at Christmas time we wanted to help," Frazee explained.

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The blackened, burned out shell at the corner of Dunlop and Bayfield streets continues to serve as a reminder of the overnight blaze that destroyed businesses and left dozens homeless.

As the task of cleaning up the debris continues, the families who called that corner home are moving on, with a little help from the community.

"The people, so far, have been amazing," said Louise Parsons, of the tenants she has spoken to since the fire almost two weeks ago. She was asked by the Salvation Army to interview the people affected to determine what they needed to get back on their feet.

"They're just so thankful and amazed by the community's generosity," she said.

"People are finding alternative places to live," she said. Three families will be in new places before Christmas and the rest are staying with family or friends while they search for a new home. Anyone who has a permanent apartment available for someone can call the Salvation Army and the information will be passed on to the families still looking.

It's not just friends and family who have been pitching in.

"Things are going very well," said the Salvation Army's Roy Randell. About \$38,000 in cash has come in to the Bank of Montreal. "We really do need \$50,000," said Randell, the executive director of the Salvation Army's downtown Bayside Mission. The goal is to help each of the affected families equally, ensuring everyone has furniture, kitchen appliances and bedding.

Each family will receive a \$500 gift certificate to Canadian Tire to purchase household items and small appliances. The Salvation Army is working with Smitty's Fine Furniture to help with some of the larger items.

The Barrie store (now called Barrie Furniture) is also sponsoring one of the families, providing them with all they need to furnish a new apartment. "We want to make sure everyone has a bed, a kitchen table and chairs and a couch," she said.

There are still some families waiting to return to their apartment, once the city has deemed them safe. Cash donations can still be made at any Bank of Montreal location across Canada to the Five Points Fire Victim Fund. The Salvation Army is administering the fund.

Anyone who can help out with some permanent housing can call Louise before the end of the year at 321-3574.

Traffic is back to normal on most of the downtown streets, which had been closed since the fire.