

PASADENA THE CITIZEN

RV unit brings access to recovery

By [YVETTE OROZCO](#)

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More than two weeks have passed since Hurricane Ike left Texas Gulf coast residents scrambling — first for cover and then recovery.

For many, that recovery is still mired in the process of reaching out for the right resources.

One Economy Corporation, a non-profit global organization which uses technology to help communities improve lives, is navigating its Ike Help Center Mobile Internet Site, a traveling RV equipped with computers, Internet access, cell phone charging stations and a staff of volunteers.

In a joint effort with AT&T and community-based groups like ACORN, One Economy's objective is to help residents throughout impacted areas reconnect with services that could speed up their recovery processes.



On Tuesday, the RV was parked at the Cleveland/Ripley Neighborhood Center on Fairmont and is scheduled to be available today at Blessed San Juan Diego Catholic Church on 3301 Pasadena Blvd. from 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

With a history of working with disaster recovery, starting with Hurricane Katrina and the Southern California wildfires, One Economy began working its way through the Texas Gulf coast immediately after Ike.

“In this particular case, because so many people are still without power and unable to get into their homes, the one thing we could do to really help people is bring that Internet access and computers to them,” said Austin Bonner, director of communications and media relations for One Economy. “Even if they were without power, they could still sit down, work on their FEMA papers and have a volunteer there to help them with anything thing else they need to take care of, whether its contacting their e-mail or contacting insurance companies or obtaining emergency food stamps.

On Tuesday, the lines had disappeared by late afternoon, but One Economy, AT&T and ACORN representatives expected the after-work hours to pick up.

The RV is more than an informational contact point for impacted residents, said Jane Montoya and Laura Parewski, program managers for One Economy.

“Most people come in because they need information and they want to talk to a person about their situation,” said Montoya. “We give them information: Who do they call? What office do they go to? People bring their insurance information to me and say, ‘What do I do?’”

The RV may not be the resources to put residents fully back on track, but it will provide the means to begin and further the steps.

“It’s like a catch-all, we’ll help them find what they need for the next step,” said Parewski. “At the same time if they want to bring their application and we can go over it with them and give that extra confidence to assure that their doing it correctly.”

Assurance is an important part of what the RV is bringing to the more impacted residents, those who have been uprooted from their homes.

With dozens of residents in Pasadena having been displaced by Ike, whether from a house or apartment complex, whether temporarily or permanently, the recovery process is impeded by automated phone calls, mounds of paperwork, feet of red tape and weeks, sometimes months of FEMA bureaucracy.

“They just want someone to listen to them, they want someone to acknowledge that they’ve been through a rough situation,” said Montoya.

Alain Cisneros has been on hand as a bilingual representative of ACORN, a non-profit national group which mobilizes low-income residents in local communities to work toward change. From the immediate aftermath of Ike, ACORN has seen the frustration among residents first-hand as residents look for concrete answers about their future.

“We have meetings with FEMA and people have been frustrated because they ask questions and there is no one answer – it’s just ‘you may get help — you may apply, but you may get help,’” said Cisneros.

That may can be disconcerting for those who need help for their families immediately, said AT&T representative Mary Ojeda.

“Many people come to us thinking that we are FEMA,” she said. “They want that ray of hope that they will get help,” she said. “We may not be able to be that ray of hope for them, but we can help them begin the process.”

Following its Houston area stops, the RV will continue to other affected areas throughout next month. For updated schedules, visit www.ikehelpcenter.org or text IKEHELP to 29222.

Help available

What: The One Economy Corporation Ike Help Center Mobile Internet Site, a traveling RV equipped with computers, Internet access, cell phone charging stations and a staff of volunteers.

When: 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. today.

Where: Blessed San Juan Diego Catholic Church, 3301 Pasadena Blvd.

On the 'Net: www.ikehelpcenter.org.