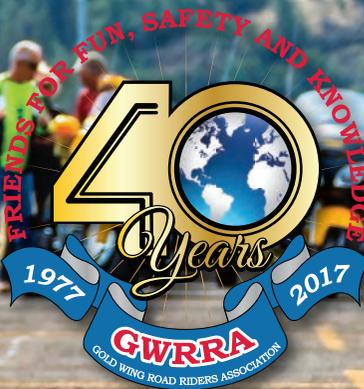


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WING WORLD

DRILL TIME



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East Tennessee volunteer spirit

By Gary L. Mace



Severe drought hit the southeastern U.S. during the latter half of 2016. Rainfall deficits of 10-21 inches made the Smoky Mountains and surrounding areas at risk for wildfires. In mid-November, several dozen broke out and smoke filled the air from northern Georgia to southern Virginia. At one time, I heard of 67 wildfires burning in Tennessee,

Kentucky and North Carolina alone.

Nov. 23, a wildfire started near the popular eastern Tennessee hiking trail, Chimney Tops. Firefighters battled the fire for several days. Nov. 27, high winds, sometimes peaking near 80 mph, turned the wildfire into an out-of-control inferno. Fire burned over 17,000 acres, including portions of Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge. Over 1,800 structures were destroyed, including homes and businesses. Sadly, some lives were lost. Many residents were left with nothing. Some were forced to hastily evacuate having time only to retrieve loved ones and pets. We heard several stories of families having to drive through fire-covered roads in order to escape. Every story was different. Every story was heartbreaking.

For Lakeway Wings, GWRRA Chapter F, from Morristown, the Great Smoky Mountains and surrounding area are dear to us. Many of our rides are in the mountains and foothills. One of our favorite rides each year is a picnic ride. So it only seemed right that we find some way to help. Our Chapter volunteered for a shift at a donation distribution center in Pigeon Forge. Twenty Members volunteered: Dave and Brenda Schaar,

Liz Smith, Paul and Becky Sheffield, Gary and Lisa Mace, Michelle Wright, Stella Tucker, John Griswold, Roland Groleau, Carol and Dino Belcastro, Jackie Couey, Larry Harbin, Gene Dunn, Van and Nancy McElhaney, and Bill and Fran Potter.

We were assigned different duties. Some Members sorted through donated clothing and food dividing it by gender, size or grocery type. Others carried sorted product to volunteers who were assigned to departments on the floor. Those volunteers would keep items stocked on shelves and let sorters know when certain items were needed. Some volunteers acted as greeters, directing victims and volunteers to appropriate staff. Other volunteers were shoppers. They would query the fire victim to find out their



needs, direct them to the area, where we tried our best to find what it was they needed. Paul, one of our veteran Members was chosen to find out which victims were veterans. Groups had set up funds specifically for veteran victims and Paul ensured they could take advantage of this generosity. Some volunteers provided transportation, shuttling victims from motels to insurance company mobile centers and back.

The amount of donations was unbelievable. The number of volunteers was also a true testament to the volunteer spirit of Tennesseans. One thing that struck me was the victims' resolve – clearly they were battered, but not beaten. Most, who I worked with as

a shopper, were reluctant to take much. They felt that surely someone needed items more than they. I was happy when I could convince them that donations were still coming in by the truckload and to take what they needed to help them through this trying time. I was struck by some of the items that seemed to bring the most joy – a simple toy brought a gleam to a young child's eye; for pet owners, a dog toy or dog snack. Items we take for granted, such as a nail clipper or can opener, were in most demand. I am so proud to be part of an organization and Chapter that does not hesitate to offer help in times such as this. [www](#)

Gary Mace is GWRRA #391215.