

Help is on the way

As it appeared in the Guam PDN, Sunday September 6, 2015.

Sandy in San Diego column

The connection among Chamorros across the world has always fascinated me. The response to the recent crisis following devastating typhoon Soudelor in the CNMI has been a testament to this enduring connection.

A few weeks ago, I reported on the response of the CNMI San Diego Club. Immediately, the group put a fundraising effort into place, followed by a collection of item donations for victims of the typhoon. The outpouring of help since then has been remarkable.

A total of \$10,600 was collected and provided to Saipan's Karidat Social Services. As of September 1st, a 40' container was filled with needed water, clothes, non-perishable food and school supplies.

CNMI San Diego Club President, David Atalig recently met with the CNMI Lieutenant Governor, Ralph Torres who reported that things were still very bad for the residents of the CNMI. Atalig told me that 400 homes are still uninhabitable, water is restored, but full power restoration is not expected for weeks. Businesses are not able to open, leaving people unemployed and unpaid. School is starting, but supplies are short. Much was destroyed in the storm. Things like bug repellent, candles and batteries are scarce and have become expensive. The repercussions are sad and mounting.

As news of this has spread, the Chamorros around the world have come together to help. A planned 20' container of donations grew to become a 40' container coming out of San Diego and Los Angeles. Other containers were reportedly

filled in Hawaii and in Washington State, and will soon be on their way.

Organizations pitched in. "We could not have done it without the Guam Club," says Atalig. The Sons and Daughters of Guam Club in San Diego provided their patio as a storage area for a month for the San Diego donations. Their associated fiesta and cultural groups helped with collections. Pacific Toll Processing in Long Beach helped to prepare and load the container, while the Matson Foundation provided the shipping.

Many doing the physical loading of the container were former residents of Saipan. Young and old had family and a bond to the island that compelled them to see the assistance project through.

The CNMI Club is still hearing of needs on the islands, and plans to collect yet more donations. Karidat social services says that more than once, their food supplies have run short. "People are calling us to empty storage units and garages. We have people drive to homes and load up vans. It's nice to see people so giving. We hope to fill another container," reports Atalig.

The container from Los Angeles should arrive about September 18th, to provide some relief to the victims of the storm. We send along our thoughts and prayers for a full recovery soon.

Photos below by Susan Castro-Cabrera.



CNMI San Diego Club President, David Atalig



CNMI Club loading trucks of donated items for shipping





CNMI Club and Volunteers prepare a 40' container of donated items bound for Saipan.