

'My cup runneth over with gratitude': Local volunteers help Rio Dell veteran's widow make plumbing repairs

Repairs made after woman was without water for 3 weeks, she said



From left to right: Back row: Jeremiah Evans, Matt Gilliland, Wade Long, Ken Fleck. Front row: Young Porambo, Ryan Swanson, Ryan Cassidy. These volunteers repaired a broken water main at the residence of military widow Maritess Brady in Rio Dell over the weekend. (Rena Maveety — Veterans Service Office)

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A group of local volunteers who coordinated with county veterans services and local businesses to do a good deed were able to assist a 70-year-old Rio Dell woman make some much-needed repairs to her home.

On Saturday morning, seven people led by Eureka plumber Ken Fleck of Fleck and Perry Plumbing in Eureka, drove down to Rio Dell to assist Maritess Brady who had a broken water main that had led to a serious drop in water pressure and much higher water bills.

Fleck and the other volunteers heard of Brady through Rená Maveety, the veterans service officer with the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services. Brady, whose deceased husband was a marine who served in World War II, turned to Maveety when she realized she desperately needed a plumber.

“During the course of my work, she made me aware of the hardship she was experiencing with her water service,” Maveety said Tuesday. “She was struggling to find a reputable plumber who would work with her, so I called a local veteran who is very connected (Pierre Carbonneau) and asked him for help. He told me to call Ken ‘The Plumber’ (Fleck) and to tell him he was sending Brady to him and that he would help cover the cost of the repairs.”

The cost of the repairs to a broken water main running from the street to the Sequoia Avenue home was more than Brady could afford. After speaking with one plumbing company who advised her it would be at least \$3,000, she reached out to Maveety.

“They were so awesome, all of them, so very kind-hearted, they sympathized with my plight and knew I could not afford to pay for the repairs,” Brady said Tuesday afternoon. “(Maveety) was the one who spearheaded the effort and if it had not been for Ms. Maveety and Mr. Fleck, I don’t know what I would have done.”

Maveety happened to be out of town when she learned of Brady’s plight. She said she immediately reached out to the Eureka Police Department because she is familiar with several members who are also veterans.

Between Fleck, who handled the materials and supervised the repair project, and Maveety, who worked to get as many volunteers as she could, a total of seven people spent six hours Saturday to do the job. Three Eureka police officers volunteered their time: Ryan Swanson, Ryan Cassidy and Young Porambo. They were joined by Cody Fleck, Wade Long, Matt Gilliland and Jeremiah Evans.

The volunteer work crew had to break their way through the driveway and the sidewalk to address the leak and they dug a 25-foot-long, 18-inch-wide trench in order for Fleck to run a new pipe from the water main to the house.

“We went down because she’s the widow of a veteran who needed help,” Swanson said Tuesday. “All the officers who went were veterans and we figured we would want someone to help out our spouse if they needed it. That’s why we did it.”

Swanson said the work was your typical labor associated with such a project that came with one additional hindrance — a very, very thankful homeowner who insisted they eat and drink as well as work.

“She was super-appreciative and she was a super-friendly lady,” Swanson said. “It was funny, she went and bought us pizza and we’re trying to work as she’s handing it out. I thought to myself, ‘I can’t work with a slice of pizza in my hand’ but I also couldn’t say no. Veterans have to stick together and we need to help where we can and we have to work together for the betterment of the community.”

The project was a pretty standard repair job, according to Fleck, but it was the willingness of members from across the community that was the most satisfying.

"It was very much a team effort and the job was fairly straight-forward, not easy, but straight-forward and I could not have done it without their help," Fleck said Tuesday.

Fleck also said Hensell Materials in Eureka donated 25 bags of concrete while Fleck handled the plumbing materials.

"There was no other way the job was going to get done, no other contractor would do that job for free," he said. "I think these guys deserve the recognition for what they did."

For Brady, the fact that her water bill is no longer topping \$500 is one reason to be thankful as is the fact she lives in a community where strangers will take time from their day to help out someone in need.

"My cup runneth over with gratitude," Brady said as she offered profuse thanks to the volunteers. "The first plumber I contacted told me it would cost \$3,000. When Mr. Fleck came in and got all the volunteers to come to the house, they all sympathized with me. They donated their time and their effort. I didn't have water for three weeks and they came in and now my problems have been solved. I would like to send my heartfelt gratitude to all the volunteers."

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