

Local Bank Raises Funds for Flood Relief in Monroe County

Over \$9,000 raised by community and F&M Bank together.

By NICOLE VIK
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With numerous households and businesses throughout the community struggling to pick up the pieces in the aftermath of this summer's devastating floods, Farmers & Merchants Bank in Tomah decided to help.

F & M Bank set up a Monroe County Disaster Recovery Account where people could make donations for those specifically in Monroe County who were impacted by the storms. They began gathering donations in August, matching the first \$1,500 of donations.

"The local community raised the money and the bank matched funds. It was individual donations, businesses donated, people just stepped up when we put it on our website. It was all local people who were donating from all over the county, it was wonderful," President and CEO Peter Reichardt said. "The bank wants to thank all of the individuals and businesses in the community that supported it. Because of them, it's a great day for everyone in Monroe County."

Including its contribution, the bank raised \$9,165.25 with the help of the community. F & M Bank then reached out to United Way in order to get the funds out into the community.

United Way began searching for the best organization that could distribute the funds to people right here in Monroe County. They contacted Long Term Recovery Group Region 1 under Wisconsin VOAD, which had been active in 2007-08 when there were floods in the area. The group was active up until 2013 when it went dormant due to lack of activity.

When this year's flooding happened, the former chair made some phone calls asking interested parties to come back to the Long Term Recovery Group. In early October, a meeting was held to establish officers to reinstitute the group, including Chair Jen Schmitz and Treasurer Sue Durtsche.

Since the group itself is limited on funds, they are directing those affected by flooding, who need help, to follow a disaster assistance sequence of delivery. Individuals need to first register online at www.disasterassistance.gov or in person at a Disaster Recovery Center before Dec. 17 to receive funding from FEMA and SBA.

"We really need people to register because the more people who register for individual assistance has correlation to how much public assistance the recovery group gets," Schmitz said. "I'm not really sure if we're going to have funds to help people who have not registered because we don't have that many funds. We really have to encourage registration first. We don't want to pay for something that FEMA is willing to pay for at a national level."

Once individuals have applied to FEMA and SBA, they can then email the Long Term Recovery group at ltrg.region1@gmail.com to receive additional funding, including the money raised by F & M Bank. “We don’t want to give away funds to people who qualify for FEMA or SBA funds,” Chair Jen Schmitz said. “Once they receive those we can then supplement what they still need. We will give money to people who have received FEMA and SBA funds, we just want them to go in sequence.”

“A lot of people have been devastated by floods, it’s overwhelming for those of us who are doing fine, but it’s really tiring and exhausting for people to try and figure out how to access funds when they’re dealing with a crisis. We’re trying to make it as easy as possible for people,” Durtsche added. “The money donated by F & M Bank will go specifically to Monroe County residents who have unmet needs.”

The Long Term Recovery group will be providing crisis counselors and case managers. According to Schmitz, the case managers are the ones who will add the objectivity to the process. “Individuals seeking assistance will get assigned a case number and we as the recovery group will just hear their situation and we’ll objectively try to hand out what’s needed,” she said. “Because so many small communities are being affected we don’t want decisions being made biasedly.” In its bylaws, the Long Term Recovery group will be assisting both residents and small businesses.

“We felt that was really important because of how many small businesses and farms were impacted by this flooding and how many incomes may be impacted long term and that will definitely fall into a category of unmet needs,” Schmitz said. “FEMA’s primary concern is making sure people can get back into their homes and can live. SBA is making sure basic functions are restored and then we’re coming in to make sure people can work and will be able to function close to their normal lives.”

In addition to its generous donation, F & M Bank will also be offering Disaster Relief Loans to individuals and businesses affected by flood damage. Individuals can apply in person at either of the bank’s two branches or by calling (608) 372-2126.



With the help of businesses and individuals throughout Monroe County, Farmers & Merchants Bank of Tomah raised \$9,165.25 that will be raised to help individuals, families and small businesses in Monroe County that were affected by flooding earlier this year. Herald photo by Nicole Vik.