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Town of Palm Beach United Way sends \$303,000 to repair community centers and water system in the Bahamas

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The Town of Palm Beach United Way recently sent a combined \$303,000 in funding to help rebuild communities in the Abaco region of the Bahamas.

The locally-based Eagles' Wings Foundation received \$115,000 to restore the community center in Coopers Town, The Green Turtle Cay Foundation received \$100,000 to repair the water system in Green Turtle Cay, and Treasure Cay Community Foundation received \$88,000 to rebuild the community center in Treasure Cay. The communities are part of the greater Abacos, a group of islands in the northern Bahamas about 180 miles off the South Florida coast.

The community center in Coopers Town currently serves as a library, computer lab, command center and temporary school for the entire north district of Abaco, according to Eagles' Wings. The group requested funding for new computers, radios and a satellite dish to make the multi-purpose resource center operational. Funding was also needed for mold remediation and water damage, to install showers and sinks, and to establish a well head, pump and storage tank.

"This funding will make a huge difference to repair, restore and upgrade the library and community center of Coopers Town," said Scott Lewis, president of the foundation. "It will become a technology hub for the community, with upgraded computers and enhanced internet access, allowing children and adults to gather, learn and grow. The addition of a backup generator and backup water system will ensure that the building is operable for future disasters, and the upgrades will provide a central location for emergency personnel to operate from."

Funds sent to Green Turtle Cay Foundation will help restore the water system that supports approximately 500 full-time Bahamian residents of Green Turtle Cay. The small out-island received little to no relief from the Bahamian government and few visits from recognized international relief organizations following Hurricane Dorian, according to the group.

"There are not enough words to describe the heartfelt gratitude from everybody on the island," said Patrick C. Koenig, Director of Green Turtle Cay Foundation. "We have a long road still to travel but progress is being made and this assistance will help us achieve our goals. Palm Beach United Way is a hero in all respects."

The Treasure Cay community center will be repaired to serve as a hurricane shelter during future storms. The roof, floors, walls, water and sewer systems, showers and bathrooms

will be repaired, and sitting areas and meeting spaces will be added. The building will also be used as a food pantry and commissary.

“Having a place where people can go to get water, get supplies, take a shower, use toilet facilities, get out of the sun for a bit, and just have a place to go gives them hope, and gives them some dignity,” said Shawn M. Fay, Sr., a member of the board of the Treasure Cay Community Foundation. “In addition, it allows those who left to make the decision to come back to Treasure Cay and the surrounding areas to seek work and start rebuilding their lives.”

The Town of Palm Beach United Way started a Bahamas Recovery Fund in collaboration with the Town of Palm Beach in early September to support long-term recovery efforts in the Bahamas following the devastation caused by Hurricane Dorian. John and Jana Scarpa kick-started the fund with a \$100,000 matching grant that was met in 24 hours. A \$50,000 grant from The Matthew and Tracy Smith Foundation was matched in 36 hours. And a \$100,000 grant from the Cathleen McFarlane Foundation was matched in 48 hours. To date, the fund has raised nearly \$690,000 from 250 donors.

A Bahamas Recovery Fund Committee was established to review project proposals and decide how best to distribute the fund. Town resident Keith Beaty and Deputy Town Manager Jay Boodheshwar co-chair the committee. Members include Mayor Gail Coniglio, Gary Lickle, Bill Paty, Matthew Smith and Cindy Sulzberger. The committee received 31 project proposals from 11 organizations representing over \$7.7 million in requested funding.

In October, the United Way awarded a \$125,000 grant to Man O War Relief Fund for the purpose of rebuilding the public dock in Man O War Cay. In November, Northern Abacos Relief and Rebuild received \$171,000 to help repair 153 homes in five settlements in the Northern Abacos. The Bahamas Recovery Fund Committee will continue to review proposals to determine how best to distribute the remaining \$88,500 of the fund.

“We’ve worked quickly and diligently to make sure donations received by the Town of Palm Beach United Way were distributed to organizations and projects that were truly making a difference in the lives of local Bahamians,” said Keith Beaty, co-chairman of the 7-member Bahamas Recovery Fund Committee. “I’m proud to say that 100% of donations are going to efforts that will help individuals and families rebuild their lives and their communities.”

To donate to the Town of Palm Beach United Way Bahamas Recovery Fund visit palmbeachunitedway.org/hurricane-relief. Donations are tax deductible and 100% will go directly to long-term relief efforts in the Bahamas. For more information call 561-655-1919.

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