

# Local

## Aid agency looks to help wherever

■ DHH seeks donations to fill needs

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The hands that help after a disaster take on many challenges.

Rebuilding, feeding and clothing survivors. Refurnishing a family home, re-equipping a kitchen, even making a computer available to kids who don't have them are parts of the Disaster Helping Hands mission.

"Our focus is need in the Wichita County area, but we've stepped up to help victims of natural and man-made disasters," said Leon Green, Disaster Helping Hands executive director. "We also assist veterans as much as we can."

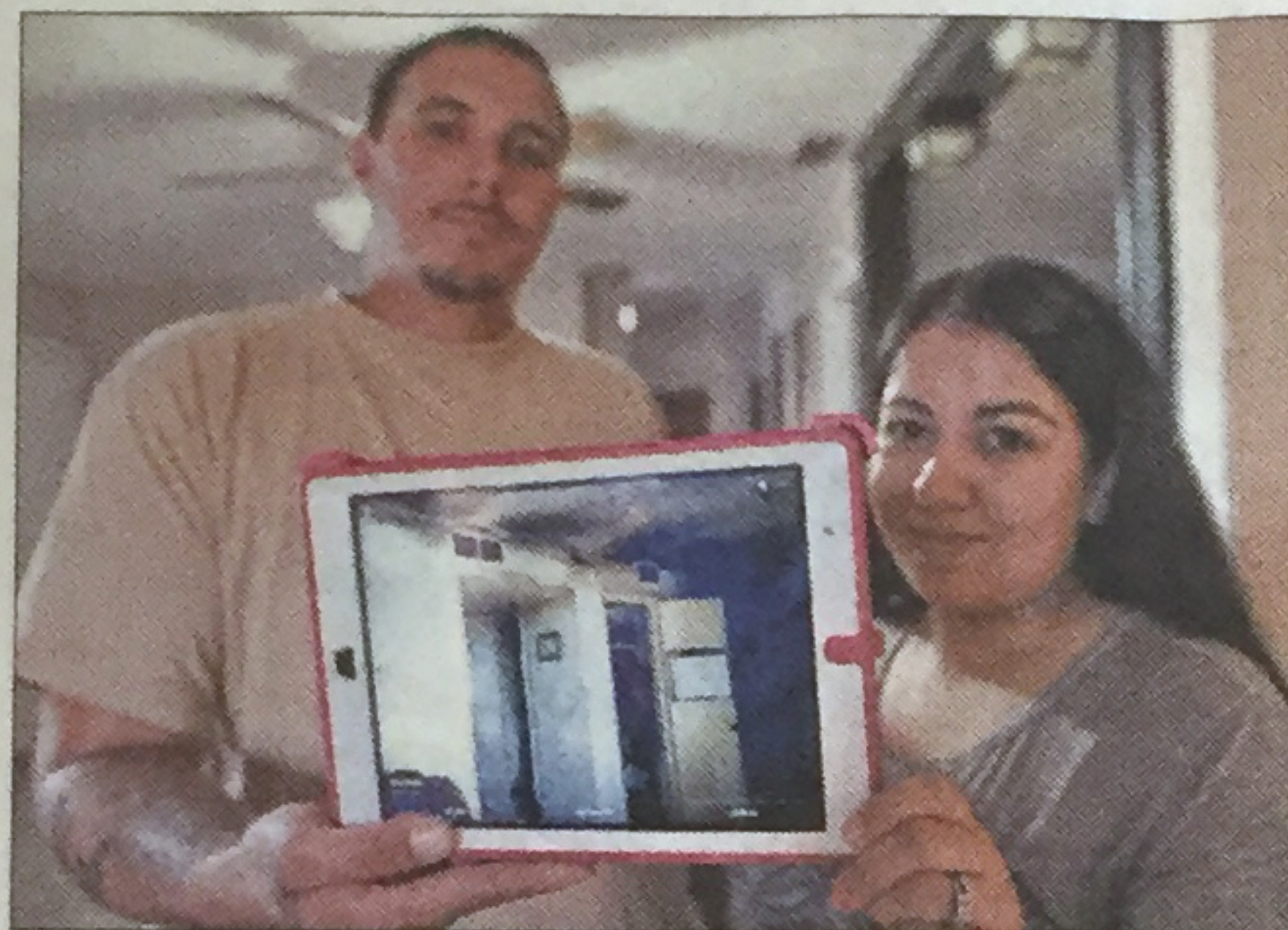
It was almost midnight when Brian Chapa smelled smoke coming from a downstairs apartment. After seeing to the safety of wife, Lisette, and their children Gavin, 4, and Mila, 2, Chapa alerted his sleeping neighbors.

When they returned to the apartment, smoke damage had ruined almost everything. Furniture, clothing, the children's toys. They stayed with Brian's mother, then a month or so in another apartment.

The couple were closing on a house with no furniture when they Leon Green.

"He brought a sofa, love seat, coffee table, end tables, a queen size bed and dressers for us and the kids," Chapa said. "It helped us start all over again."

In the days following the 2013 horrific fertilizer plant explosion in West, Texas, DHH responded.



Brian and Lisette Chapa show photos of damage from a fire that started in the apartment unit below theirs in 2015. Smoke damage ruined almost everything in their apartment.

"Leon and his group gave us a call," said John Simcik, who coordinated donations following the disaster that damaged and destroyed 150 buildings and took the lives of 15 people.

"Things were pretty tough, and they showed up with five bobtail trucks full of all kinds of donations. Food, clothing, bedding — it was amazing and very helpful. The food went to the food banks, relief workers took care of the clothing, home furnishings — nothing but good things."

A few weeks later, Simcik says Green called and asked "if we needed more."

Although the structure survived, a 2011 fire at Youth Opportunities Center destroyed the kitchen vital to its work with kids. While volunteers handled cleanup and paint, replacing kitchen appliances was difficult.

"After the fire happened I received a call from Leon Green saying he had some appliances for us. Mr. Green brought them over himself, a refrigerator and freezer," said Brenda Jarrett, YOC director.

"We're still using them. I am very grateful for DHH and Leon Green for being so considerate in our time of need."

Clinics of North Texas retired 65 computers and donated them to DHH. Green directed the units to Boys & Girls Club members whose families couldn't otherwise afford them. Faith Mission has received donated washers and dryers for client use. Support for the survivors of Hurricane Isaac, a 2009 massive Montague County grass fire and the Joplin, Missouri, tornado have been delivered by DHH.

"There have been great challenges over our nearly seven years since organizing DHH," Green said. "Especially fundraising so we can get everything done debt-free by not requesting a loan for anything, not knowing where the money will come from to pay for it."

DHH moved into its warehouse two years ago, meeting plans for geothermal heating and cooling. Currently Green is fundraising for the final round of improvements.

"The agency needs assistance raising \$180,000 to complete solar panels on a garage, necessary energy storage, large fans inside the warehouse," said Green. "With the significant increase in the cost of fuel, we want it not to be an issue in the future."

On acreage the agency

■ Instead of turning on the TV kids are watching YouTube and Netflix on tablets and phones. 3B



PHOTOS BY TORIN HALSEY/TIMES RECORD NEWS

Brian Chapa, his wife, Lisette, and their children, Gavin, 4, and Mila, 2. The Chapas have gotten their life back together about a year after an apartment fire and smoke damage turned it upside down. Disaster Helping Hands provided pieces of furniture that helped set up the family's new home.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Donations are gathered in the Disaster Helping Hands storage building. Currently the nonprofit agency is in need of appliances and furniture — things disaster survivors need to restart their lives.

already owns with a determination to be self-sustaining, DHH also has plans for a hydroponic system to grow plants and raise fish as a way to raise funds.

"Selling both will generate a source of income," Green explained. "Step by step we're getting things done."

Anyone interested in making a financial

donation to DHH and arranging the pickup of donated, working appliances or good-condition furniture can contact Green at 940 704-9258 or go to [disasterhelpinghands.org](http://disasterhelpinghands.org).