

## United Way assisting in rebuilding after local flood

By mid-August, which was two weeks before the original application deadline (since extended to October 2), about 4,000 families in Broome County had applied for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help rebuild their homes following the damage they suffered in the June flood.

However, none of these applicants is likely to get all of the money needed to return their homes to their pre-flood condition from FEMA. While funds from other federal and state programs will help, tax-supported programs alone will provide only some of the funds needed by area residents who experienced the flood's devastation. Most of the other support the victims receive will come from local individuals, charities, and businesses.

Most of this assistance is being coordinated by an organization you may not have heard of, but which swung into action within a few hours of the

local flooding. It is known as VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) and is a partnership of the secular and faith-based not-for-profit agencies in Broome County that respond when there is a natural disaster, together with local government services. Included from the beginning have been representatives of the American Red Cross, Broome County Council of Churches, Broome County government, Catholic Charities, The Salvation Army, and United Way of Broome County. The organization has grown since, with the addition of other United Way member agencies and other community organizations. As many as 50 people have attended some VOAD meetings. John Spencer, executive director of United Way, and Art Johnson, commissioner of Broome County Social Services and Mental Health, are serving as co-chairs of VOAD. Three other United Way staff members also are serving on VOAD.

### Coordination of disaster recovery efforts

From its first meeting on June 30, one of the goals of VOAD has been to coordinate efforts so that no flood victim is overlooked. As the flood disaster relief moved from the emergency response to the recovery phase, the supply needs also changed—from food, water, and personal care items, to supplies needed for home clean-up, including buckets, work gloves, and shovels.

Volunteers, including many from area churches and businesses, were helpful in removing water-soaked items from homes, tearing out flooded wallboard, and removing mold.

Now the flood response is entering the rebuilding phase, although many homes are not yet dry enough to install new wallboard (if the wall studs are not completely dry, mold will return if covered by new wallboard, which then must be torn out so that the mold can be removed).

Because the flood that swept over many sections of Broome County in June also affected other parts of New York and several other states, our area did not, perhaps, receive as much assistance from outside the area as have other recent disasters. But some traveled many miles to help out, including members of Nechama, a Jewish organization based in Minnesota, and a tractor-trailer full of repair tools which arrived from western Canada, courtesy of Samaritan's Purse (a nondenominational evangelical Christian organization).

While local flood victims will be assisted by home-owners insurance, FEMA grants, Small Business Administration loans, do-

nated materials, and volunteer labor, FEMA estimates that more than 700 families in Broome County affected by the flood will need some continuing assistance, and 500 of them will have complex problems requiring extensive aid from the community.

### Group looks at distribution of resources

VOAD has established a subcommittee known as BAND (Broome Area Networking in Disaster) to help in the rebuilding effort. Specifically, it will coordinate the distribution of locally available materials and funds to those affected by the flood. Such resources, combined with federal and state funds, probably will not be sufficient to return flood victims to their pre-flood conditions, so the tough decisions will have to be made about how to spread the limited resources among the families affected by the flood.

To help meet the needs of these families, United Way has created a special fund. Any money donated to this fund will be added to the funds raised by BAND. An "unmet needs" committee is being established of representatives from a variety of local direct service agencies that are continuing to provide disaster response help to the flood victims. Once all other sources of funds available to a family have been exhausted, the caseworkers for these families can apply to this combined special fund to help local flood victims with their recovery plans.

*This newsletter is also available by e-mail. Contact [pr@uwbroome.org](mailto:pr@uwbroome.org)*



*Youngsters participating in the Jewish Community Center's summer camp add to their donation to United Way to help Broome County flood victims. With assistance from their counselors, they donated more than \$120 for the flood victims.*