

HopeSource, strangers, family and friends help put life back together



Mary Swift

Randy Newman

Randy Newman, who lost everything when his Sunlight Waters home burned in the Taylor Bridge Fire, says he has a lot to be thankful for. (Mary Swift / for the Daily Record)

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By MARY SWIFT for the Daily Record |

Randy Newman, whose rental home in Sunlight Waters fell victim to the summer's Taylor Bridge Fire, doesn't mince words.

Everything he owned went up in flames.

Everything, he says, except, of course for the clothes on his back, his cell phone, boots and Yager, his dog. In the end though, when the smoke was gone and the ashes had settled even Yager was gone.

Blame cancer, discovered when Newman, trying to get resettled, took Yager to the vet for some immunizations.

Now, at 48, Newman is working to pick up the pieces of a fire-disrupted life.

The classic Ford pickup his father had passed on to him years ago is gone. So is his Jeep. So is the van Newman, who ran Newman Hardwood Flooring, used for his floor installation work. So is the \$6,000 commercial sander that was part of his equipment. So are the trophies that his son Mike, now a freshman walk-on on the WSU football team, accumulated over the years "since he was this high," Newman says holding his hand about four feet off the floor.

A plastic bucket contains the barrels of what were once his guns.

On the day before his life turned upside-down, Newman had come back from a job on the West Side, loaded his truck with some of his possessions because authorities were warning residents to be prepared to leave, and gone to bed.

At 4 a.m. the next day, he says, the sheriff's office ordered him out of his house and transported him from the property.

By the time he saw his home again, all that remained were the charred and melted remnants of his former life.

Enter the Red Cross which helped connect Newman with HopeSource. HopeSource offered short-term housing at the Polaris Project in Cle Elum while he got back on his feet. In return for the neatly kept studio apartment that is now his temporary home, he is installing laminated flooring in some of the units.

“So at least I feel like I’m contributing something,” he says. “I’m not just sitting here sponging off of them.”

Photos of Mike that were destroyed in the fire have been replaced including a photo of Mike at his high school homecoming. And his senior pictures has been replaced by the photographer who took them, Newman said. Both photos sit in silver frames he picked up at a donation center for fire victims.

“Everything you see here is from someone,” he says, pointing to the couch and chair in his tidy living area. That includes the dishes and cookware in his kitchen, a braided rug at the door, his TV and entertainment unit, even the clothes he is wearing.

A tapestry that his stepdaughter gave him featuring images of Mike playing football for the Cle Elum-Roslyn Warriors has been replaced and hangs across one window. A poster featuring photos of Mike playing for the Warriors hangs atop a large mirror that dominates the living space.

Donation centers in Cle Elum and Ellensburg helped him replace furnishings. Newman, who did not have renters insurance and carried only liability insurance on his vehicles, bought a \$900 car with a check that came in shortly after the fire. But when he found a job tearing out a floor he needed something bigger. Someone donated a van to HopeSource and HopeSource passed it on to him to use for work.

Without all the equipment he needs to work, Newman, who has worked as a framer as well as laying floors, is scrambling to find jobs he can still do and his parents have pitched in to help him with some of his immediate bills.

“My bills didn’t burn up,” he says. “I had some things that needed to be paid.”

What does he have to be thankful for?

He pauses.

There’s HopeSource that put a roof over his head and found a way to use his skills to help the agency and give him a sense of earning his keep.

There are the strangers who donated to help him and other fire victims.

And there’s the small army of friends and family members who continue to offer encouragement and support.

“My kids, my family, my friends,” he says. “I lost everything but I got them.”