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PANAMA RECEIVES SCHUYLKILL LOVE

Schuylkill family raise money, sending aid to victims of recent earthquake in Central American nation



A home under reconstruction after it was destroyed by the earthquake on Oct. 9. **PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATIE SANCHEZ**



Bags of supplies staged for delivery to families.



A home in Herrera Province in northern Panama that was destroyed by the earthquake on Oct. 9.

By Michael Urban
MURBAN@
REPUBLICANHERALD.COM

Katie Sanchez is a Schuylkill County native, but she'll always have a passion for the people of Panama, where she spent years of her childhood doing missionary work with her family.

She loved how tight-knit the Central American nation was, and how the people she met, though often impoverished, were quick to help others in need.

"I've never seen a more beautiful example of a society," she said.

So when a magnitude 7.7 earthquake struck Herrera Province in northern Panama on Oct. 9, she wanted to assist — as did her mother, Bonita, and her father, Gino.

They started a GoFundMe page to raise money for an earthquake relief fund, which they are sending to Gino's sister in Panama, Lelis Herrera. She then buys relief supplies that the team is trucking to where the earthquake destroyed hundreds of homes, injured dozens of residents, killed two and left many without shelter.

Baby formula, drinking water, food, tarps, hygiene products, blankets, mosquito repellent, raincoats and first-aid kits are among the items being delivered to as many of the nearly 20,000 people affected by the earthquake as possible, Sanchez said.

"People there worked and saved their entire lives to build these cinder block houses, and now they're destroyed," she said. "They don't have homes."

Sanchez is a Williams Valley graduate who grew up in Tower City and now lives in Mohrsville, Berks County. She saw those homes, and met the people who live in them, as a girl on her family's church missions. Her mother, a Pottsville native, was doing missionary work herself when she met Sanchez's father, a Panamanian native. After marrying and moving to Schuylkill County, they continued returning to Panama to perform that work, and they brought their daughter along.

"My heart is still with those people," Sanchez said.

Thousands in northern Panama are now living in emergency shelters, and 576 schools and 42 health centers are damaged, according to emergency officials.

Though delivering the supplies to rural villages on damaged roads is difficult, coordinating the work as an independent team is an advantage, Sanchez said.

"We're not a big organization, and that's our strength. We can move fast and go where the need is," she said.

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Dems cast 69% of mail votes in region

Luzerne County chairwoman expects high turnout rates, hopeful that will translate to wins

By Michael P. Buffer
MBUFFER@CITIZENSVOICE.COM

A total of 42,056 voters in Lackawanna, Luzerne and Schuylkill counties — 9.3% of registered voters — have voted early with mail ballots in advance of Tuesday's election, and nearly 69% of those votes came from Democrats, according to state data posted this week.

In the three counties, nearly 42% of registered voters are Democrats, while 43% are Republicans and nearly 15% are unaffiliated or other party voters. Republicans cast 24.5% of the mail ballots returned, and less than 6.7% came from other voters.

In Luzerne County — where 41% of registered voters are Democrats — 67% of the mail-ballot vote came from Democrats.

"These numbers tell me that we should expect high turnout rates for Democrats on Tuesday, and I'm hopeful that that'll translate to Democratic wins up and down the ballot," Luzerne County Democratic Chairwoman Megan Kocher said.

Lackawanna County Democrats are 51% of county voters and accounted for nearly 76% of the

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Voter Hall of Fame: Nothing stops the few devoted voters

By Melissa Janoski
MJANOSKI@
SCRANTONTIMES.COM

MAYFIELD — A certificate from the Pennsylvania Voter Hall of Fame arrived at Al Chelik's house unexpectedly a few years ago. Once he figured out what it was, he framed it and hung it in his "man cave" as a memento of his devotion to voting.

"I can't remember missing any election," said Chelik, 83.

Chelik is one of 3,593 people from Lackawanna County listed in

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