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# THE WINDSOR TIMES

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## New app increases communication for WUSD community

Emergency services, day-to-day workings improved by new technology

By Heather Bailey  
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In a technological clean sweep, the Windsor Unified School District has launched a new website and a new smartphone app. The revamp was headed by the IT department, which explored several different companies and platforms before selecting a system from Apptegy.

"It was about a year ago, after the fires of 2017, we did an analysis of our communication systems to see how our website worked and functioned," Superintendent Brandon Krueger said. "We were looking at our communication capacity and realized, through a lot of feedback from users, staff and parents, that we probably didn't have the easiest communication system.

"We realized that the trend is having social media, having news feeds, having smartphone apps," he continued. "We ended up working with Apptegy which has helped us redesign the website — it's easier to navigate through and more upfront. And having the smartphone app has been wonderful, especially at school sites, where a principal is needing to get a message out on his or her own phone. Its just so much easier to push messages out."

The investigation process began under the former Instructional and Technology Services Director for the district Tim Rocco, and has continued under current director Christopher Moghtaderi.



Screenshots by Heather Bailey

**APP-TASTIC** — Panels from the new WUSD app allow users access to notifications, documents, a calendar and all kinds of other information.

"When I got here, one of the goals was to improve communication with our families and so we were looking at specific solutions for web and app development. Based on our comparisons, we felt that this would be the easiest tool for us to use and to train our staff on," Moghtaderi said. "The template for the website is very easy to manage and the app itself is extremely simple to manage and to post to. Our goal was to have a one-stop solution to be able to put something into an email, text, voice and into an app notification

all at once."

The app is downloadable from the WUSD website or from the App or GooglePlay stores. Among the features available are access to a live feed, news and a calendar, as well as access to the dining program and any and all documents that might be needed, like permission slips and registration forms.

The app will also put out notifications from admins to the subscribers.

"One of the features is that it really does decrease the amount of

time it take for us to deploy a message," Moghtaderi said. "Myself and one of my employees and the principals have the access to do that, along with our superintendent and (Lisa Saxon) our director of curriculum and instruction and her assistant.

"We do have different levels of access," he continued. "One is an 'unmoderated' user and one is 'moderated' we can set up as many moderated as we want, but the posts have to approve by an admin. Unmoderated users can post without

it going through other channels." Krueger agrees that the ability to push information quickly and easily is a major boon to the app.

"I can get a call at Oliver's while I'm shopping that something is going on and I can pull out my phone and send a message out within a minute," he said. "Before, I'd have to get to my computer and go through 10 minutes of process to get a message out. And, I love the fact that its smartphone friendly, because so many people have smartphones."

While the website and app are fully rolled out, they are still somewhat in a beta phase, which Krueger anticipates will continue for several more months.

"We're still working out some bugs and making sure that information from the old website, which we still have, but is not accessible to the public, is being brought over. We're still in the learning stages but it's proving to be an easier to use system," Krueger said. "I would say the ongoing process of refinement will probably happen through the next few months and, if you can call something perfect, we would imagine perfection or near perfection by the end of the school year."

But while emergency communications are the cornerstone of the new app, it is general connectivity that all involved hope will be improved with the new technology.

"Partly because of some of the emergencies in the area lately, such as fires or flooding, but also just to improve communication," Moghtaderi said. "We want parents to become more involved in their student's education and we know student outcomes improve when parents are more connected with their school and their district."

## SO curious? YOU ASKED, WE ANSWERED!

### The North Bay Fire Relief Fund

By Katherine Minkiewicz  
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**Q:** "Out of the money donated to the fund that Redwood Credit Union had, where, exactly, did all that money go? (How did it get down to families who were in need)?" — Anonymous

**A:** After receiving this question from a local who wishes to remain anonymous, we set out to interview the folks behind the North Bay Fire Relief Fund, Senior Vice President of Community and Government Relations Matt Martin and Communications and Public Relations Manager Tracy Weitzenberg. We also asked for stories highlighting how individuals used fire relief funds to get back on their feet.

In the span of 16 weeks, \$32 million was raised, portions of which were distributed via checks, gift cards and Visa cards to families, first responders, students, nonprofits and businesses.

The fund was organized as a dollar donor system. Redwood Credit Union (RCU) paid all administrative costs of the fund so 100 percent of donations went to those in need and according to Martin, around 70 percent of all dollars donated came from outside of the four impacted counties.

"People were pouring out from everywhere wanting to help. Every state in the union was represented and 23 other countries were donors," Martin said. "Two weeks into it I got a call from Sweden saying it (the fund) doesn't take the currency but they still wanted to donate."

The fund, which was launched shortly after the fires on Oct. 9, was established in conjunction with California State Sen. Mike McGuire and The Press Democrat and from start to finish, 41,000 donors participated.

In order to determine who would be the main recipients of the funds, RCU focused on creating support for immediate aid.

For fire survivors, RCU partnered with nonprofits with experience in receiving and vetting applications for assistance. United Way of the Wine Country, La Luz, North Coast Opportunities and the Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership all provided resources for helping to

vet and process applications.

For the nonprofits, an independent grants committee comprised of local leaders from fire-impacted counties worked to vet grantee applicants.

"We balanced providing immediate fire relief for survivors along with a careful vetting process managed by our nonprofit partners," Weitzenberg said. "The size and scope of this disaster made this a challenging task, but we knew we had the right organizations well versed in these procedures."

Martin said nearly \$20 million went directly to first responders, students, individuals who either lost their homes or experienced an economic hardship due to the fires.

2,253 K-12 and college students who lost books and supplies also received a chunk of the change. Funds were given out in the form of gift cards so students could choose their own items.

A total of \$9.59 million via grants went to support 56 nonprofits providing services to fire survivors.

"It was important to help bridge that gap and help them get from point A to point B to (get) people clothes, food, financial assistance, mental health support, security and more," Martin said of the grants.

One million dollars was provided in an effort to help small businesses affected by the fires. Loft Salon in northern Santa Rosa was just one business that lost its building, supplies and all of its equipment. With the provided funds, the salon was able to get new equipment for all 17 stylists and re-launched its business.

A total of 195 Sonoma County businesses were granted funds, and a remaining four are still in the fund application phase.

This story's anonymous questioner said she wondered how funds got to people who needed it the most.

Weitzenberg shared several stories of how nonprofits, especially mental well-being organizations, used the funds to make a difference.

"We're hearing from nonprofits that the services they are able to provide with funding from the North Bay Fire Relief Fund are making a real difference," Weitzenberg said. "We heard a story of a 5-year-old girl who lost everything in the fire and her traumatic stress manifested itself into stomach aches, sleeplessness, nightmares, uncontrollable crying



Photo Tribune archive

**HELP FROM HEALDSBURG** — Healdsburg parents and their children held a bake sale and raised \$2,538.11 for the North Bay Fire Relief Fund. They are shown here outside the RCU Windsor Branch.

and separation anxiety. She was able to receive free therapy sessions through one of our grantees."

The girl is able to sleep again and her nightmares and stomachs have significantly decreased.

Another fund grantee was able to provide housing assistance to a family of three who lost their home and were living in their car. They were also able to receive financial assistance and gift cards to replace basic items.

"We also heard about an older gentleman that lost his livelihood. Without any family support, he became severely depressed. With the support of one of our grantees, he was able to find housing, a new job and regain home," Weitzenberg stated.

Martin never expected to raise \$32 million in funds.

"It was unprecedented," he said. "We were absolutely blown away and humbled by the outpouring of compassion from friends and neighbors from all around the world. It just stunned us."

*Is there something you've been wondering about Windsor? We want to hear from you. SoCurious? invites you to be a part of the local news reporting process. For more information or to submit a question, go to [windsortimes.com](http://windsortimes.com) and click on 'SoCurious'.*



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**BIG CHECK** — Steve Falk, of The Press Democrat, State Sen. Mike McGuire, Cynthia Negri, president of the Redwood Credit Union Community Fund, and Brett Martinez, of Redwood Credit Union, from left, hold the relief check.