

# Volunteers help North Texas family recover from house fire

June 28, 2023

Mark Korenek sat in a chair in the middle of his burned-out Grand Prairie home looking a little overwhelmed. Soot-covered Texas Baptist Men volunteers swirled around him, some with wheelbarrows, moving charred personal items from the fire that burned his home in January.



TBM volunteers showed the love of Christ by removing debris—and recovering treasured personal items—from a burned-out home in Grand Prairie. (TBM Photo)

The sound of a revving skid steer moving everything from sheetrock to clothing into a massive 40-yard trash container threatened to drown him

out as he recalled the tragedy that burned the home he shares with his wife, Karen, and sent him to the hospital for almost two months.

“It was Jan. 12,” he recalled. “I got up and got my wife off to work at First Baptist Church Dallas and went back to bed for an hour. At 6:30, the smoke alarm sounded. The fire started far away from me but traveled through the attic.

“When I woke up, I could see nothing because of the smoke. I grabbed my cell phone, ran to the hall and saw nothing but flames.”

His call was recorded by 911 at 6:32 a.m.

“I told them, ‘I’m going to be in the back yard, I have five dogs and no one else is in the house,’” said Korenek. “I crawled down the hall and went to the backyard. I fainted going through the back door. I felt myself fainting and rolled on my back. I knew when the firemen arrived, but I never really came out of it.”

Three of his dogs made it out with him. Two died in the home, overcome by smoke. While not injured by the flames, Korenek spent months recovering from the effects of smoke inhalation.

“The firemen hit me with a shot,” he explained. “The chemicals in our house produced cyanide. The shot was used to draw the cyanide out of my body. They took me to Parkland (Hospital), and Parkland put me in a medical coma for four weeks. Their job was cleaning my lungs. My kidneys shut down. My pancreas shut down.

“I am told by the nurses I coded (ceased heartbeat) five times,” he said. “It was awful for my wife, Karen. She’d be holding my hand, and I’d code, and they’d kick her out.”

When Korenek woke from his coma, he said his medical team “reminded

me I was in the fire, and then they began the trauma of dialysis and put me on insulin because my pancreas had shut down.” He was intubated four weeks to clean his lungs.

Still sitting in his chair, Korenek grinned as he said: “I’m happy to say I lost 72 pounds, ... the wrong way. They got me up the next day and started me walking. I was there until late February. I think I witnessed to every nurse there with the message, ‘God saved me.’”

Speech therapy and psychiatric tests followed to see if the smoke inhalation had affected his brain. He began rehabilitation, and his latest round of tests indicate no permanent damage.

## **‘We knew we’d need an army’**



Mark Korenek of Grand Prairie, whose home burned in January, appreciated the recovery ministry of TBM volunteers Curt and Ann Neal and the teams they coordinated. (TBM Photo)

As he wrapped up his story, TBM volunteers continued to swarm around him, busily moving the remains of the home to the trash dumpsters.

By the end of the week, 45 volunteers helped reduce the house down to its studs to prepare the family for the next step of recovery.

Sabrina Pinales, TBM ministry advancement coordinator, called the week “a two-team effort. We have several trained disaster relief volunteers on site, and we also have day volunteers who have a desire to serve.”

TBM volunteer Curt Neal, the on-site coordinator, called the week-long project “unique.”

“We solicited anyone and everyone who would help. We knew we’d need an army, because the house was full of things,” Neal said. “This couple are collectors, which made the cleanout task more difficult.”



Since Mark and Karen Korenek are collectors, TBM volunteers gave special attention to recovering and storing items found in their burned-out home. (TBM Photo)

By the end of the week, the TBM team removed five 40-yard and five 30-yard trash containers of material and possessions from the home.

Neal’s wife Ann served as a coordinator at the site, as well as trailer manager and chaplain to the volunteers and homeowners. She said the project embodies TBM’s desire to bring “help, hope and healing.”

“When we first come in, we’re help, but after even a few minutes, you quickly see the hope. When you get to this point in a clean out, survivors are seeing things get back on track,” she said.

“We’ve seen (Mark) break down and cry, and (Karen) has broken down and cried several times today. I told them, ‘We’re cleaning out your house, but we’re here for you, to love on you, and do whatever you need.’”

Volunteer Jan Rahmandar echoed the sentiment.

“I came out to show God’s love. I can only do one day, but God said, ‘Go do what you can do.’ I’m pulling nails because it helps the homeowner get back on his feet,” Rahmandar said.

“It’s a job that’s overwhelming for the family,” volunteer Steve Glover agreed. “We’re helping get them organized so insurance can come in.

“TBM is a family, and what a great witness it is to this family to know we’re doing it and asking nothing in return.”