

Wayland professor initiates drive to assist Lahaina school

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PLAINVIEW—When Libby Cleveland, longtime math professor at Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, saw news coverage of the Lahaina fire in Maui, her heart was broken for students left without classrooms more than 3,400 miles away.

So, she asked administrators at Wayland, which has an external campus in Hawaii, to provide a way to help students displaced by the fires on the island of Maui.

“What I saw was such devastation. There was nothing left. I was concerned for the children—the students,” said Cleveland, who has been teaching math for 62 years, including 30 years at Wayland.

“Schools offer a stable place for students. They lost their schools, and the students need to get back into school. I wanted to help.”

Wayland’s external center in Hawaii has multiple teaching locations, but none of those are located on Maui. However, many of the students and professors were affected by the fires in which 97 people died and 31 are still missing more than a month later.

The Maui fires, which burned 27 days, spread across more than 2,100 acres on the island. The fires have been deemed the deadliest in the United States in more than a century.

“The wildfires of Lahaina deeply hurt our souls,” said Henrique Regina, executive director and dean of the Hawaii campus. “They are our friends and families. They are our community. It hit very close to home.”

“Our guidance to our employees was to be engaged with the healing and rebuilding of Lahaina as they see fit. We decided to have faith and trust God for his wisdom and guidance leading us through his perfect timing.”

What Regina and other students, faculty and staff at the Hawaii campus didn't know was that God was already working in the heart of an 87-year-old math professor on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

Cleveland gave initial donation

Cleveland offered to donate the first \$500 to get a relief fund started at Wayland. She envisioned other members of the university family joining her in donating to help students on Maui.

At Cleveland's request, administrators in Plainview and Hawaii began exploring how Wayland's home campus in Plainview could help without being just another relief collection point.

“What I wanted Wayland to do was to help a school with students,” Cleveland said.

That wouldn't be easy immediately following the disaster. However, Regina eventually connected with representatives of Doris Todd Christian Academy, which operates two campuses on Maui.

After receiving authorization to collect donations for the school through Wayland's Student Emergency Fund, a webpage was created for [online giving](#).

Once the fund was established, Cleveland became the first donor, giving the \$500 she promised.

“We can help these children,” she said. “Some may not have anything. That's why I said I'd be the first to give.”

Once the fund has grown significantly, Regina plans to present the money personally to Doris Todd Christian Academy.