

Volunteers spiff up Logan Heights | Fire Station 7, church are among buildings painted

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Carrying brushes, paint rollers, trash bags and brooms, more than 200 volunteers fanned out across Logan Heights yesterday sprucing up the neighborhood and some of its key community facilities.

Sponsored by Rebuilding Together San Diego, a nonprofit group that provides low income housing, the cleanup day included painting the exterior of San Diego Fire Station 7 at Cesar Chavez Parkway and National Avenue.

Working with firefighters, volunteers painted the aging station a warm brown with fire-engine red trim.

And the work was welcome.

The city's fiscal crisis -- spurred by a pension deficit of at least \$1.4 billion that has drained the budget -- means that money for maintenance has virtually vanished.

"We wouldn't have been able to do this without them," said Capt. Mike Fleming, the department's facilities maintenance officer.

The fire department and Rebuilding Together San Diego have long worked together, said Pamela Thorsch, executive director of the 10- year-old group.

The group renovates homes for elderly, disabled and low-income families. It also fixes up community facilities.

Firefighters have always pitched in on those projects, installing alarms and fire extinguishers and assuring that the homes are fire safe, she said.

The group recently moved into a spacious warehouse on Franklin Avenue, and the cleanup day was designed to welcome the group to its new neighborhood. Mindful of the city's budget crisis, Thorsch decided to help out the firefighters.

"The fire department has been such a great partner for us," she said. "Now that they're in some distress, it's great we can come in and do this."

Getting a new coat of paint on their firehouse means one fewer job for the firefighters, who are doing much of the upkeep on the station on their own, Fleming said.

The city's financial problems were one reason for coming out to help, said several of the volunteer painters.

"The budget cuts are bad enough," Susan VanderBie said as she stepped back from painting a section of the front of the station.

"It's tough enough for them to get the equipment they need. So it doesn't hurt to come and help have the station look a little better at least."

The fire station was not the only beneficiary yesterday.

A few blocks away, the Golden Hill Triple A Ministry on Ocean View Boulevard was also getting a new coat of paint. William Cline, business manager for the church, said that repainting the church buildings would have cost at least \$15,000.

"If it had not been for Rebuilding Together San Diego, this would not be happening," he said.

While he spoke, several dozen church members and volunteers bustled around the property.

Among them was Robert Lowe, whose wife and two children were displaced by Hurricane Katrina. They have been living in a small house on the Rebuilding Together San Diego property. As a way of thanking everyone in San Diego, Lowe picked up a paint brush and went to work at the church.

"They gave us a place to stay," Lowe said. "I don't mind helping out. I think it's the least I can do."

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