



## United Way of Ventura County

For Immediate Release

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### **Hardship Assistance Applications for United Way Thomas Fire and Flood Fund Open; \$280K Already Approved out of \$1.5M**

**Applications available at [vcunitedway.org](http://vcunitedway.org) through April 30**

**Ventura, CA, May 12, 2018** – United Way of Ventura County (UWVC) has approved \$281,172 for individual hardship assistance from the United Way Thomas Fire and Flood Fund. This is part of the \$1.5 million made available in the current round of assistance funding, with applications for those remaining funds open through April 30.

To date, UWVC has approved more than 90 of the nearly 120 applications received for residents seeking individual hardship assistance. The remaining received applications are pending. Victims are working through the application process along with case managers at local partnering agencies.

“Being able to get the funds in the hands of those who need it has been incredibly rewarding, and we’re so grateful to be working with our responsive partners to make the process as simple as possible,” said Eric Harrison, UWVC President & CEO. “We’re looking forward to hearing from more residents to continue dispersing these funds.”

Of the applications approved so far,

- 60 percent are for housing
- 25 percent are for livelihood/income
- 15 percent are for habitability of homes
- A vast majority of requests are from the Ojai area, followed by City of Ventura

Among the business owners who applied for assistance was Erik Seyster, a Ventura-based artist working under the name “Vajra.” Seyster sells the art and clothing he designs on his website [altaroftheheart.com](http://altaroftheheart.com) and at festivals, but his merchandise and art supplies burned along with his home on Dec. 5. With assistance from the United Way Thomas Fire and Flood Fund, Erik has been able to buy additional stock to continue selling and fulfilling orders.

“The United Way definitely made it easier and faster to recover,” said Seyster.

Along with helping his business get back up and running, Seyster said the assistance he has received from throughout the community has raised his spirits. He’s now creating new artwork, including a series

focused on the mythical phoenix, which rises from the ashes. He is even mixing ashes from his former home into his paint to create the new designs.

Applications – offered in English and Spanish – and a list of partnering agencies where they can be submitted are available at [vcunitedway.org](http://vcunitedway.org).

Before submitting an application, victims should gather any documentation to substantiate needs, such as rental agreements, campground rental fees, costs replace trade tools (could be prices from online or physical stores) or insurance invoices in preparation of speaking with a case manager.

Eligible applicants are Ventura County residents, and household income limits are determined by family size of 120% AMI or less.

The United Way Thomas Fire and Flood Fund has grown to more than \$4 million. The next phase in disbursements will center on long-term recovery. To contribute, visit [unitedwaythomasfirefund.org](http://unitedwaythomasfirefund.org).

### **About United Way of Ventura County**

Since 1945, United Way of Ventura County has advanced the common good by creating opportunities for a better life for all. Our focus is on education, income and health, because these are the building blocks for a good quality of life. We support local services and programs that are more than just ‘stop gap’ measures, but rather solutions that help create lasting change. We invite everyone to be part of the change by giving, advocating and volunteering. When we work together in common purpose, we LIVE UNITED. For more information about United Way of Ventura County, visit [www.vcunitedway.org](http://www.vcunitedway.org).

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