



Centerville Recreation & Historical Association board members (from left) Julia Westlund, Teresa Kludt, Nancy O'Neill and Darlene Lightcap are dedicated to maintaining the Colman Museum and historic Centerville Schoolhouse (built in 1894). PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA

phase two and \$800,000 to complete the final phase, which will put on the finishing touches with the bridge's covering, siding and roofing.

While the HRCBA has filed a claim in the lawsuit against PG&E, the association is unsure if it will receive a payout or when, Schafer said—and, even so, still would need donations to bridge the gap to cover the full project cost after covering attorney's fees. The HRCBA is continuing to raise funds through

donations, merchandise sales and fundraising events (see infobox).

At the same time that the HRCBA has been fundraising, Schafer has been working with Chico State students on projects to help preserve the town's recent history and "create a legacy of the bridge and the fire and the recovery."

For many months during the pandemic, Schafer, a retired Chico State sociology pro-

fessor, met via Zoom once a week with two Chico State interns to create a slide presentation and video to commemorate the phase 1 rebuild of the bridge. Their latest project is another video, featuring interviews with Butte Creek Canyon fire survivors, including Schafer and Westlund. All of these videos will added to an exhibit and accessible at the Colman Museum.

Returning home

The impacts of the Camp Fire are still visible in the canyon—damaged trees with twisted limbs pepper the landscape, and empty lots remain where people used to live. But Westlund said she's been amazed by how many of her neighbors have been able to come back in these past four years. She estimates "well over 50" homes have been rebuilt, based on her observations.

"It was devastated. When you're looking at all the burnt ruins, you're thinking, 'Well, this will never get cleaned up,'" she said. "I am amazed at the progress in this amount of time."

For many reasons, the rebuild has been slow for their community, Kludt added. Some canyon residents are still waiting for their PG&E lawsuit settlement checks, for example, a deciding factor as to whether they will be able to afford to return. Rebuilding is costly, between lot cleanup, insurance costs and the price of materials. But Kludt still has hope that more of her neighbors will find a way to come back home.

"It does take a long time," she said, "but the canyon is still beautiful, and we have a strong sense of community."

It's that tight-knit community that propelled the Lightcaps forward in their mission to return home after the devastation of the Camp Fire, Darlene said. They, too, love the natural beauty and peacefulness of the canyon, and knew they could make it through the long years and stress of rebuilding because they had friends and neighbors whose homes survived and who chose to stay, like Kludt and Schafer.

Darlene said in those early days, she told Kludt that "we need people like you to stay here, to be our hub, to keep [our community] going."

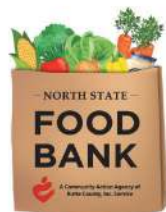
"You're still there, and that's what's bringing us back." □



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