

Realtors secure grant for tornado-damaged homes

BY CAITLIN HERRINGTON
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SENECA — Homeownership is valuable to Realtors, and a nationwide fund to help cover mortgage payments in the wake of disaster has been granted to Oconee and

Pickens counties. The Western Upstate Association of Realtors secured \$150,000 to be given out in \$1,000 grant increments for local homeowners whose primary residences were damaged by the

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agreements or rent statements. Proof of damage from the tornado must also be submitted via photos, insurance claims reports, contractor estimates or settlement proceeds.

"We can make copies at the office if need be, but it'd be best to bring copies of the documents," Smith said. "There's a fairly quick turnaround. We want that \$150,000 to make it in (these counties). We want to spend every dime of it, so if they can't come to us, we'll come to them."

If the money isn't spent in Oconee or Pickens counties, it goes back into the National Association of Realtors' Relief Foundation to assist homeowners in other disaster areas.

While Western Upstate Association president Peggy Hill worked on the application for the grant, Smith said she's serving in a boots-on-the-ground capacity to spread the word to area homeowners.

"(Seneca administrator) Scott Moulder gave us a list of people who need relief through the city, which saved time and energy getting the word out," Smith said, adding Realtors will be in hard-hit neighborhoods talking to residents about the grants.

The grants are given on a

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April 13 tornado that struck the area. Any household impacted in the Federal Emergency Management Agency-declared disaster area is eligible to apply for mortgage relief.

"Basically, the idea is an unforeseen disaster should not jeopardize your ability to maintain homeownership," local Realtor Reah Smith said. "When you have a bunch of expenses piling up from tree damage, trying to pay deductibles and maybe paying rent somewhere else while your home is being repaired, it's just a relief to have at least one month's mortgage taken care of." Application assistance takes

place from 1-5 p.m. Monday through Wednesday at Lake Keowee Real Estate in Seneca, but Realtors are available outside those hours for those who can't stop by.

The office at 896 N. Walnut St. is a relatively central location, she said, and on the Clemson Area Transit bus line for those without transportation. Applications can also be mailed.

Applicants need to provide proof of residency via a photo ID or other government-issued document, along with evidence of the mortgage on the property with a statement or payment coupon. Those who are renting other properties may be eligible for rent relief and should bring lease

first-come, first-served basis, and applications must be submitted by June 30.

"I was so thrilled to get that big of a budget amount for our area," Smith said. "Just simple math, this should affect 150

households, but a lot of people's mortgage is less than \$1,000, so we'll actually more than likely be helping more people than that 150. My goal is to use every bit of it."

To request an application or get more information, call (864) 224-7941 or email realtorsrelieffund@westernupstatemls.com.

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