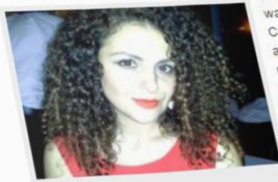




R.E.M.'s "UNITE-HELP-GIVE" disaster relief initiative helps hard-hit Staten Island



By Venila Khaferi

Hurricane Sandy's cruel hand of destruction was felt in many communities along the East Coast. Staten Island, one of the hardest hit areas in New York that received a delayed responsiveness from authorities, has started to rebuild itself, piece by piece, with the help of many grassroots initiatives and community volunteers and donations.

As New Yorkers arose together to lend a hand to those affected by Sandy, R.E.M. Residential, a Property Management firm located in Manhattan's Union Square neighborhood, joined the cause in hope to make even the slightest difference in the midst of the

immense devastation that fills the air of SI.

Rick Elezi, the company's President, whose family emigrated from Albania when he was just two, like many of us, spent most of the days during the super-storm glued to the television watching endless tear-jerking pictures of the annihilation of many homes and the stunned faces of everyone touched by this tragedy. "It was then", he says, "that I thought to myself, R.E.M. will do something to help."

R.E.M.'s offices went a week without electricity and as soon the power came back on, on Saturday, the employees got together and while catching up on lost work, they immediately began to reach out to their large network of vendors, contractors and friends in the industry. Venila, an intern with R.E.M., was put in charge by Rick to plan their relief efforts. While Rick started rallying all of his contacts in hope to get as many donations as possible, Venila with the help of Aida, an employee at R.E.M., started their week and a half research journey to make their "UNITE-HELP-GIVE" initiative as constructive as possible.

Fortunately, due to their extensive reach, they were able to raise over \$10,000 in monetary donations, including multiple donations of various goods and supplies. Donors ranged from vendors, contractors, industry associates, employees and friends and family. The monetary contributions were used to purchase a tremendous amount of goods & supplies such as cleaning and construction supplies, nonperishable food items, personal items, baby food and baby supplies, pet supplies, school supplies, first aid items, and toiletries, for which each donor received applicable receipts. Warm blankets, coats and warm winter clothing were also donated as well as a few baby playpens, cribs and swings. A hot pink-breast-awareness-truck was also generously donated to R.E.M. by Padded Wagon, fortunately assisting in the delivery of the large amount of goods. Many of the Superintendents, workers, industry friends and family came out to volunteer their time organizing and separating all the supplies according to drop-off locations, and