

Corpus Christi Hooks pitch in for recovery

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AUSTIN, Texas — When 20 members of the Corpus Christi Hooks front office staff showed up to help restore Doug Fitzgerald's home two weeks after Hurricane Harvey, it reminded him of him of a different baseball team he used to watch growing up.

"I'm from Pittsburgh. ... The Pirates' slogan is 'We are family,' and that's what it felt like," said Fitzgerald, who works as an usher for the Houston Astros' minor league affiliate in south Texas. "My wife cried when she saw all those people coming up to help us."

The Hooks brought rakes, chainsaws and even a front-end loader to spread sandy loam in the Fitzgeralds' front yard, where oak trees had been snapped, uprooted and dumped on their roof.

"I came back the Tuesday after [Harvey] ... and my nephew said to me, 'Are you prepared for what you're going to see of your house?' And I said, 'Yeah, I think I am,'" Fitzgerald recalled. "I thought I was, but it was a lot worse than I expected."

The Hooks staff cut down seven trees and dragged countless limbs off the property, helping the Fitzgeralds get back on their feet. And they didn't limit their help to Hooks family members like the Fitzgeralds – they embraced the whole Coastal Bend Region.



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For four months in the offseason, the front office staff chose a local home each Wednesday and dedicated 15 to 30 staff members to clean up debris and repair damage for the full day. The Hooks' contributions to the region's recovery, though, began even earlier, in the days immediately following Harvey's landfall.

When Hurricane Harvey hit, the Hooks had three home games left in their season, and team executives were unsure whether they should cancel the games or play.

"Talking to city officials and league executives, we [decided] our club is part of the fabric of the community, and the best way to get this city up and running is to return to normal," said Andy Steavens, Hooks vice president of sales and marketing. "It wasn't about baseball during those three days; it was about getting people to the ballpark and somewhere they could take their mind off what's been happening."

The Hooks offered free or "Pay What You Can" admission to all fans affected by Harvey. Proceeds from ticket and concession sales were then set aside for Harvey relief, along with funds raised by the club online; at cash donation booths at Whataburger Field; through sales of game-worn jerseys and "Coastal Bend Strong" t-shirts; and from the players themselves, who gave back the money fans had given them throughout the year, when ushers "passed the hat" after each Hooks home run.

The Hooks raised \$113,000, which the team donated to local Little League and youth programs.

"We want to lend a hand in making sure kids, who have had their world turned upside down, take the field this spring and summer," Hooks General Manager Wes Weigle said in February.



Hooks management also connected with Minor League Baseball partners across the country, who sent clothes, toiletries and other essential items for survivors. Other teams also ran fundraising efforts of their own, bringing in more than \$300,000 for Harvey relief, which was donated to the Coastal Bend Disaster Recovery Group, American Red Cross, Salvation Army, and United Way Worldwide, among other relief organizations.

“Hey, the fight still isn’t over. These communities are still in need of assistance,” Steavens said. “That’s part of our deal [as the Hooks organization]: Let’s not forget that these communities still need help, and [let’s] have a long-term strategy to get these communities up and running.”

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