

A photograph showing four individuals in white protective suits and hoods working in a field of rubble and charred trees. They appear to be engaged in a cleanup or investigation activity. The background shows a landscape with many dead, blackened trees and some remaining structures, suggesting a post-disaster or post-fire environment. The sky is clear and blue.

 **TBM**  
**TODAY**

STORIES OF TEXANS ON MISSION

THROUGH THE

**ASHES**

PAGE 4

# TBM provides more than 100,000 meals in the midst of Israel war

**T**BM provided more than 100,000 meals in early stages of the war in Israel, preparing meals for people directly impacted by the fighting.

The meals provided much-needed nutrition to Israelis who lost their homes and loved ones to thousands of Hamas rockets that began Oct. 7. Three specialized TBM feeding teams hand-prepared more than 40,000 meals and Israeli partners used TBM-designed mobile kitchens to provide another 60,000 meals and counting.



Roughly 40 people, including some from Kansas, North Carolina and Hungary, served through TBM teams over a six-week period. Israeli teams continue using the kitchens.

“These are very difficult times in Israel,” said Mickey Lenamon. “People are scared. Some of them spent weeks in their basement for safety with little to eat. They’re looking for help. TBM volunteers were able to deliver that help in the name of Christ.”

TBM volunteers served one woman who was volunteering at a hospital in Ashkelon who had a rocket

destroy the market at the bottom of her apartment building. In the days after the explosions, her son came home numerous times to change his blood-soaked clothes to go back and help pull bodies from the destruction. She was doing everything she could to help those who were hurting.

“There’s an obvious weight of war that sits over the country all the time,” said Doug Hall, a member of one of the teams. “It affects everyone.”

The deployment is the latest outgrowth of a years-long TBM partnership in Israel, which has included monthly training trips, extensive planning and development of a TBM deployment center in the country.

“The situation in Israel has required a great deal of coordination with our Israeli partners and with volunteers,” said John-Travis Smith, TBM associate executive director who coordinates TBM ministry in Israel. “God has positioned TBM, through its established relationships, to provide an amazing level of support to anyone in need as this war unfolds.

“I do not know of any other Christian organization that has such a well-established and fruitful ministry in Israel right now,” Smith said. “We believe God has opened this door of service through TBM, and we are seeking to be faithful in responding.” **TBM**

Apply for Israel training at [tbmtx.org/israeltraining](https://tbmtx.org/israeltraining)



# PASTOR LOSES BEARD FOR TBM MISSIONS

What began as a joke made in front of a rural Texas congregation ended with more than \$26,000 being given to drill new water wells in Peru by TBM.



**John Brandt**

Tim Smith, 36, gives the weekly announcements at First Baptist Church in Hempstead. One Sunday in October, he told the congregation Pastor John Brandt might shave off his beard if the church gave a certain amount of money for the statewide Royal Ambassadors mission project – drilling water wells in Peru.

Brandt said he decided to play along by setting a price for the shaving of his beard – one he thought would be too high to reach. The price for his shave: \$20,000.

The church had never known their pastor without a beard. Brandt started as worship pastor in 2015 and became pastor in 2017. His children had not seen him without a beard for nine years.

Children in the church started it all by raising money for the mission project associated with the annual RA Campout and Missions Mania event in November. RA is a church-centered children’s missions program of TBM, and First Baptist Hempstead has an RA chapter. It also has a Girls in Action group, so all of the church’s children were involved in the fundraising project.

The children began the fundraising effort by using empty water bottles to collect coins, Smith said. Then adults filled bottles with their gifts.

The total slowly climbed, and the people still gave. As the RA boys were “getting in the van to go to Missions Mania,” a church member “pulled up and wanted to make sure his gift got in” on time, Smith said.

Total given: \$26,000.

Brandt went to his barber Nov. 28 and said goodbye to his beard. **TBM**

[Read more of the story at tbmtx.org/beard.](https://tbmtx.org/beard)



# What is TBM doing there?



From time to time, someone asks me why TBM is doing work in faraway places such as Israel, Uganda, Peru and Poland. The answer is really simple: God presented an opportunity to meet

needs in His name that we thought TBM could effectively address.

It really is an empowered way of doing ministry.

We did not plan to go to those places. We were approached by people. We analyzed and prayed over the requests and eventually developed ways we could effectively respond in meeting human needs and sharing the love of Christ.

Anyone who knows about TBM’s history knows the role played by the study, *Experiencing God*. One of its key aspects is “joining God where He is at work.”

That’s what we’ve been trying to do, and I believe that’s why God has so richly blessed our endeavors. TBM is growing in just about every way imaginable because we have made ourselves available for God’s purposes.

God continues using TBM volunteers here in Texas, across the United States and to the ends of the earth. The last 12 months may represent the greatest variety of ministry in TBM history, including serving in more than 50 Texas cities, building a parsonage in Utah, drilling more than 60 water wells and delivering hot meals to people impacted by war. In all, TBM volunteers led more than 1,100 people to faith in Christ in 2023.

I’d say that’s joining God where He’s working.

Thank you so much for your support wherever God calls TBM to minister. Who knows what God has for us to do tomorrow and in the days ahead?

**Mickey B. Lenamon**  
TBM Executive Director/CEO

# THROUGH THE ASHES

## TBM volunteers help Maui wildfire victims search for pieces of their past, offer hope for the future

When Mari Finn awoke on Aug. 8 to heavy winds and no power, she assumed it was like any other storm that would pass. But as the storm progressed, a wildfire blazed through Lahaina on the island of Maui. It ultimately destroyed more than 2,000 acres of property and killed 97 people.



Months later, Finn finally returned to her property, but she was not alone. A team of TBM Disaster Relief volunteers worked alongside her in October as she sifted through the ash from her destroyed home. She hoped to find heirlooms and other possessions that might have survived.

TBM's months-long response ended when the final team of volunteers left Maui in December. The response began quickly after the fire as TBM sent money to churches on the island to help the victims in the name of Christ. Because of its faithful donors, TBM sent more than \$100,000 to the island.

When officials let residents return to their homes, TBM volunteers helped homeowners, like Finn, sift through the ash. Thirty TBM volunteers eventually





served, and several of those volunteers helped Finn.

Standing on her property and looking at the devastation, Finn recounted the day the fire erupted.

“You couldn’t walk around straight because of the way the wind was pushing you,” Finn said. “You had to kind of lean so you wouldn’t be knocked over.”

Gusts of wind pelted sand against her legs so hard she had bruises the next day. The wind continued to blow, and the fires continued to grow.

Police tried to inform residents to evacuate, but many residents felt they were safe from the fire. Because of the winds, it was hard to smell the fire, Finn said. It gave a false sense of security; they had no way of knowing how close the fires were until they could see them and by then there was little time to escape.

Finn and her family were able to evacuate, but many others didn’t make it. Some died trying to save their families.

“This experience is horrible,” Finn said. “But these people [the TBM volunteers] are amazing humans. They have been a blessing in this entire experience, and I am so thankful and grateful to have them here helping. As we got through the day together, they became like family. I mean they are just like extended members of our family now.”

Due to the condition of properties and the potential of unsafe particles, volunteers wore personal protective equipment from head to toe – white Tyvek suits, booties, hood, goggles and a mask. The suits are meant to keep unsafe particles away from the body, but they also block ventilation.

The work was so physically demanding, the teams were required to rest 20 minutes for every 20 minutes of work.

The volunteers were able to help Finn recover several items: Ceramic bowls and plates, coins, some jewelry and her brother’s army medals, which she said was a blessing to discover.

“I don’t believe we found a lot of things that are of great monetary value,” said TBM volunteer Ann Neal. “But what you find when you’re doing these ash outs is most people are not looking for those material things. They’re looking for things that mean something to them and their family that they can pass down through the generations.”

Being at her property and seeing the destruction was overwhelming for Finn. But she found comfort looking to her left and seeing the same mountain that was always there and looking to her right and seeing the ocean and hearing the comforting sounds of the waves crash against the beach just as it always does.

“The fire destroyed the material things in our lives, but left us with what is important – us,” Finn said. “Nobody in my family got injured or passed away, and we thank God for that every day.” **TBM**

## NOT ALONE.

When Mari Finn went back to her fire-destroyed property the first time, she was not alone. TBM volunteers walked and worked with her as she processed her loss and looked for possessions that had survived. The volunteers’ compassion and empathy comforted Finn and helped bring her peace during a difficult time.

# JOIN GOD WHERE

**With everything going on in the world, sometimes it's easy to forget that God is still working through His people to transform lives – even during their hardest days.**

God often makes that happen through TBM volunteers who serve as the hands and feet of Christ. Through tens of thousands of hours of ministry and many more hours of prayer from people like you, TBM volunteers have led more than 1,100 people to faith in Christ in the past 12 months.

Together, we have the opportunity to join God in His work here in Texas, across the United States and around the globe.

“God calls each of us to share His love with others,” said Mickey Lenamon, TBM executive director/CEO. “But He goes before us. He prepares hearts. He guides our words. He opens avenues for the Gospel to be shared. As a result, lives are transformed through a relationship with Christ.”



# HE IS WORKING

**When you give financially to support TBM ministries, you make it possible for TBM volunteers to:**

**Meet needs during people's most difficult days.**

Whether they're serving a hot meal, chainsawing a tree, drilling a water well or rebuilding a home, TBM volunteers always are meeting critical needs during the hardest parts of life.



**Lift people's spirits.** As TBM volunteers minister, they encourage people. They give others hope they can overcome the obstacles before them and that better days are ahead.



**Share the Gospel.** With your support, TBM teams share the Good News of Christ everywhere they serve. They remind people God loves them and has plans for their lives. A relationship with Christ changes everything.



**DONATE NOW:**  
[tbmtx.org/ways-to-give](https://tbmtx.org/ways-to-give)



# TBM VOLUNTEERS BRING *Christmas* TO THE VALLEY



# ABOUT 30 TBM VOLUNTEERS BROUGHT GIFTS AND HELPING HANDS TO THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY FOR CHRISTMAS. THE GIFTS AND RESOURCES CAME FROM COUNTLESS TBM SUPPORTERS WHO GAVE TOWARD THE SECOND ANNUAL CHRISTMAS IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY MISSION TRIP.

TBM collected and distributed gifts for children and adults – toys, blankets and food – living in colonias, which are unincorporated communities of about 100 families living in extreme poverty, said Jorge Zapata, founder of Hearts4Kids, TBM’s partner in the effort. The mission trip volunteers included five Texas Baptists Go Now student missionaries.

In a related effort in nearby Hidalgo County, TBM Rebuild volunteers worked on a community center for Iglesia Bautista Horeb in Brownsville. Volunteers from Longhorn Baptist Student Ministry at the University of Texas in Austin provided much of the labor – the second year a Longhorn BSM group has worked with Rebuild.

“What we’re doing here with Texas Baptist Men, we’re meeting

people’s needs, especially with the children,” Zapata said. “So all of these toys are going to be a blessing.”

The volunteers went to colonias near Donna. The toys naturally thrill the kids, but they also give the parents joy, too.

“A lot of these parents have four or five children in a home, so they can’t afford to buy toys for each child. So this will bless mom and dad,” Zapata said.

Sabrina Pinales, TBM’s director of missions and discipleship, coordinated the statewide collection. In addition to the toys, volunteers handed out blankets for the coming winter months and hygiene kits.

“This is a fun time to ease the burden for the families that maybe can’t provide the gifts they would like to for their families,” she said.

The volunteers also delivered and set up 15 twin beds in different colonia homes. “We have hundreds of children sleeping on the floor because they don’t have a bed,” Zapata said.





At Iglesia Bautista Horeb, Pastor Olber Roblero addressed volunteers building the community center. “I didn’t expect to have all of these amazing people,” he said, noting “all this effort, leaving their families and to be here. . . I’m grateful.”

Roblero has been pastor of the church for three years, and the congregation established relationships by meeting needs, especially of the children who attend a nearby school. “There’s about 2,500 kids around this area,” Roblero said, so the church began providing backpacks, shoes and clothing for those in need.

The community center at Iglesia Horeb is to aid that ministry to children and their families, as well as providing space for English as a Second Language and General Educational Development (GED diploma) classes.

“This is a blessing for us,” Roblero said. “So what I see is amazing. We couldn’t do this by ourselves, and I offer this building to the glory of God.”

Rafael Munoz, TBM Rebuild coordinator, organized the volunteers at Iglesia Horeb. “When we were looking at how we could come out and support [Roblero’s] ministry, we realized that he was already on the go; he was doing a lot. . . . He’s doing work in the community to reach the four schools that are surrounding this facility. So there’s a big vision.”

Both TBM efforts in the Valley centered around local

ministries, Iglesia Horeb and Hearts4Kids, that are committed to long-term efforts to address spiritual and physical needs.

Hearts4Kids is working with churches in the colonias and starting new Bible study and house church groups where there are no existing churches.

Before distribution of the toys, the volunteers set up tables on a cul-de-sac without houses. They organized the toys by age and gender. They grilled hot dogs for the community. They parked a pickup truck filled with blankets just past the food tables.

Zapata instructed the volunteers to “be friendly, have big smiles and a lot of love” as they distributed the gifts. Then he prayed.

“Father, we ask you to take every gift, put your hand on each gift. . . . We ask that your Holy Spirit start moving right now in this area, in every home, that when people arrive they will feel Your presence, the power and the love and the joy. . . . Bless this place. . . . This is your house . . . Let your presence be felt right now.”

Joy reigned as the kids and their parents steadily worked their way along the tables, selecting appropriate gifts.

And the volunteers did as Zapata instructed – being friendly, smiling and loving. All toward the hope that Christ would be honored in the community. **TBM**

# GEORGETOWN MAN KEEPS ALIVE LATE WIFE'S GIVING SPIRIT



Christmas is the gift-giving season, and some gifts have a rich story behind them. Such is the case with a gift given by a Georgetown man for TBM's Christmas mission effort.

Don Denton and

others at Crestview Baptist Church in Georgetown learned that people in the Rio Grande Valley needed blankets to help them keep warm this winter. Denton had extras, so he gave four of them for the TBM project.

Jim Kneale, a TBM Disaster Relief chaplain, said Denton asked if crocheted blankets were acceptable. Kneale responded that such a gift would be great and much appreciated.

Kneale did not know at the time, but Denton's wife had passed away two years earlier.

Kneale said: "Here is a man who recently lost his wife and is willing to donate blankets she hand-crocheted to keep others warm. In my family, those types of items usually are handed down from generation to generation, you know, kept in the family."

Kim Rose, the Dentons' daughter, said: "Dad is a wonderful and generous man, both with his time and energy. Mom would have been thrilled to know 'those old blankets' would be of use to someone. She was always making things to give to others. They are a beautiful example of Christ's love in action."

The largest blanket would fit a queen size bed, and the others varied in size down to one about 5 by 3 feet, Denton said.

Crocheting was something Doris did "all her life. She usually kept a bag of yarn by her chair" to crochet whenever she had an opportunity, he said. "She would give them to whoever wanted them."

Don Denton continued the giving pattern by giving four more away for people in the Rio Grande Valley.

"I still have some blankets left," he said. "They're just part of the household around here."

Denton said his wife loved the Lord. Now, the work of her hands will provide warmth for some residents in the Valley. **TBM**

[Read more of the story at tbmtx.org/blankets.](https://tbmtx.org/blankets)



Denton, 91, still has some of the blankets made by his wife, Doris, who died two days before her 82nd birthday.

"My wife passed away a couple of years ago, and she did all kinds of crocheting," Denton said. "I got to looking around the house, and there were several of those blankets. I thought there could be no better use" if they can "keep people warm."



## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

# For Benny Saenz, Royal Ambassadors is 'a family thing'

**Benny Saenz leads the Royal Ambassadors chapter of Mid-Cities Community Church in Midland, but he doesn't do it alone. The Saenz family is kind of an "all-in" team when it comes to RAs.**

When *TBM Today* caught up with Benny at the RA Camp in Menard, Texas, he was surrounded not only by his chapter members and leaders, but by his family – wife Noemi, who served as a camp nurse; and sons Benjamin, 19, an RA Frontiersman; Samuel, 14, an RA State Staffer; and Junior, 10, an RA Crusader.

And, for the Saenz family, Benny said their commitment to missions "is always about the Great Commission. Honestly, I think we all have the same goal, it's just, every time you hear my boys talking, every time we talk, it's always the Great Commission.

"We try to live the Great Commission, we try to be the example, and any chance we have, we try to teach it to the kids."

That commitment often translates into action for Team Saenz. "We're busy at home and (at work), but the vacations that we do have, we want to serve," Benny said. "So we're either here at RA Summer Camp, Family Camp or Men's Retreat – we just love serving together as a family."

Benny said he became a RA leader out of conviction for teaching his boys – and others – biblical truths in a way they could understand and apply them. That conviction was made

clear when he saw his eldest son learn spiritual lessons at a RA camp years ago.

"There was a teepee in the back, and there was a very loud guy, his name was (RA leader and TBM Board member) Juan Sanchez, and he was out there teaching them and everything he taught them had a spiritual application.

"When I saw that spiritual application, I was just blown away," he recalled. "It almost seemed like the kids weren't paying attention, you know – they're throwing rocks, playing with twigs – but they were like sponges, my son Benjamin was a sponge. He was able to retain everything that he learned, and I was just blown away."

With his conviction came a conversation with Sanchez and a challenge. "Brother Juan asked me, 'Hey, who's your RA leader at church?'"

"I was like, well, it's kind of our pastor."

"Your pastor can't be the RA leader," Sanchez replied. "He has too much to do."

"Long story short, I had every excuse in the book that you always hear, 'I don't have the tools, I don't know what I'm doing.' But Juan told me, 'Just be a RA leader at your church, and we'll help you.'" **TBM**

