In New London, a College Comes to the Rescue

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NEW LONDON — Bruce Byrne had planned to spend the last few days touring the Kearsarge region with his mother, Betty, who lives in Florida. He has encouraged her to move closer, and this visit they were planning to check out places for her to live.

Then came the snow, the rain and the ice.

Last Friday morning, Byrne’s Newbury house lost power and he and his mother moved to a neighbor’s two doors away, taking advantage of the propane fireplace. With a candle, a kerosene lamp and a battery-powered radio, the two made do for a few days. They heated water and soup on the gas stove, drove into town to get water to flush the toilet and went to sleep around 8 p.m.

“We’ve listened to so much Christmas music on the radio with the batteries that I’m ready for another holiday,” said Betty Byrne yesterday, as she lunched roast beef, potatoes and cauliflower at New London Hospitality and Safety Center, a shelter in the Wear Campus Center at Colby-Sawyer College. Earlier, her son had gone to the shelter for water and breakfast, and they’d returned for lunch.

Overall, their spirits are high, said Betty Byrne, who is not deterred from moving north. “If I move here,” she said, “I’ll live closer to New London on one of these main routes. I’ve been watching who gets power first and taking notes.”

The Byrnes are just two of the more than 100 residents of New London and its surrounding communities to take advantage of the shelter, which offers a warm building, three meals a day, fresh water and cots for those who need to spend the night.

The combined effort of dozens of volunteers, the shelter is open to anyone who needs food or a warm place to stay. “It’s

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Frustrated with wet wood, Sheldon Boege of New London looks into a struggling fire while his wife, Betsy, tries to keep warm. The Boeges have been without power since early Friday morning; they have been relying on the New London shelter for food and water. “People have been nice and helpful,” says Betsy Boege. “We don’t mind the cold, we can handle it, it’s the pipes that we are worried about, if they go it would be a disaster.”

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New London’s Colby-Sawyer College Offers Shelter

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been great to see the town pull together,” said Selectmen Larry Ballin. “A lot of good people come out at times like this.”

Town officials have been told by Public Service of New Hampshire that 90 percent of New London will have power restored by this afternoon. The number does not include customers whose power line on their property is out of order, said Town Administrator Jessie Levine.

The shelter opened in the New London Elementary School on Friday but moved to Colby-Sawyer College on Monday. It will remain open tomorrow and as needed after. Anyone is welcome, but residents in need of medical assistance are encouraged to go to the New London Hospital. Dogs are welcome at the shelter and cats are offered temporary boarding at Country Cats of New London.

“It’s an awful situation, but the outpouring from the community has been amazing,” said Pete Berthiaume, director of emergency management for New London and director of campus safety for Colby-Sawyer College.

The New London Hospital did not lose power in the storm, said hospital representative Susan Bryant. The hospital did accommodate about eight residents who were on oxygen or other medical devices that require electricity. It also helped evacuate wheelchair-bound residents to the shelter.

With power out and roads covered with ice, Colby-Sawyer College closed Friday, a week early, and postponed finals. International students stayed with faculty and staff, and students who needed it were offered accommodation in the campus center Friday night.

With provisions for another week, Mike Heffernan, a manager for Sodexo, which provides food services for the college, said his staff offered meals to anyone in the community. He said he has served as many as 80 people at a sitting and as few as 20.

Most businesses across the area also closed over the weekend, but Clarke’s Hardware on Newport Road, was open Saturday amidst the power outage. Employees helped customers down aisles with flashlights and took orders with a calculator. According to管理员 John Dixon, on Saturday the store sold out of nearly all its emergency supplies, including batteries, lamp oil, gas cans, and generator plugs. By yesterday most of its replenished stock had also been sold. Dixon said he hadn’t seen a situation this extreme since the ice storm of 1998, “but the power outage for this one is much worse.”

Pizza Chef, off Main Street, lost power but staff continued making pizza in the propane oven, said Missy Owen, owner of neighboring OMG Boutique, which closed for three days. She said workers from the pizza restaurant bought candles from her to light the building.

Owen also lost power in her New London home. “We’re spoiled,” she said. “You feel so removed from the real world. You don’t have the Internet. You don’t have TV. You have no idea what’s going on.”

John Kiernan, owner of Village Sports, found a burst pipe when he returned to his store on Monday and didn’t reopen until yesterday afternoon. “It wasn’t that bad,” he said, though missing out on sales a week and a half before Christmas is never good. “Snowshoes, ice skates and cross-country skis took a backseat to other priorities,” he said.

One thing Kiernan noted was how random the outages were. He said his house was the last on his street to remain with electricity. “The outages have been so sporadic. There’s no sense to it all.”

Back at the hospitality center, Linda Marston of Newbury, and her son Charles, were helping to accommodate visitors to the shelter. “It’s great they have stuff like this,” she said.

Linda Jagiard, another volunteer who lost power in her New London home over the weekend, also volunteered with the aftermath of the 1998 ice storm. “This is an area where people help each other,” she said.

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