

GPIA gives update on island's recovery

Pine Island Eagle

Representatives of United Policyholders attend meeting, provide information to assist islanders

Last Tuesday, June 18, the Greater Pine Island Alliance providing an update on the island's recovery during its monthly meeting at the Pine Island Community Church where guest speakers from United Policyholders were asked to give a presentation.

GPIA founder Aaron Barreda reminded everyone at the meeting that although the GPIA does not have the ability to financially fund everyone who may have home repair needs from Hurricane Ian damage, he is confident that everyone will be helped at some point.

"Financially, we are always looking to continue ... \$60,000 or \$100,000 sounds like a lot and we are very grateful to be able to have that and have a place to work out of and operate but some of these homes — they take \$20,000 they take \$30,000 to put back together, so those funds come and go very quickly so we're always looking for donations. Please come to the website and feel free to donate because we have a lot of survivors on the list that we have not funded," Barreda said.

Barreda reported that construction on six homes has been completed in the last month. In April the organization was able to raise another \$79,000 and in May, \$36,000 through Unmet Needs of Lee County, he said.

Annie Barbour, from United Policyholders, explained that the non-profit organization has been around for 33 years helping survivors navigate their insurance. Information can be found on its website, UnitedPolicyHolders.org, such as how to choose a contractor, read your policy or keep from getting scammed. Much work can be completed remotely such as on Zoom, she said, making it possible to help people from various parts of the country.

"We go where we're needed and where we're invited," Barbour said.

Barbour introduced another United Policyholder representative, Julitza Perez, who assured attendees they were not alone in recovery, although something as catastrophic as Hurricane Ian would likely take a great deal of time from which to recover. Currently, the organization is visiting all the communities that were affected by Hurricane Ian, she said. The services offered are free, she said, and although there is no legal representation offered, there is guidance through the process.

"If you still have doubts and you need to learn how to read your policy, come by. We're here to help," Perez said.

She said people should call with any questions regarding help they might need: Julitza Perez at 787-454-3353 or Annie Barbour at 707-479-8152.

Barreda said for help, folks could also call the GPIA office 239-558-4901 or visit the website GPIALLIANCE.org.