

Giving thanks

STAFF REPORT

Days before the June tornado hit Coal City, the congregation at New Hope Presbyterian Church announced the selection of Mark Hughey as its new pastor.

Hughey responded to immediately to assist church members impacted by the storm, and when the skies cleared he offered to take on an even bigger task.

Since coming to town, Hughey and his church staff have been responsible for coordinating the ongoing volunteer effort.

To recognize just a few of the many volunteers, the congregation hosted a thanksgiving meal on Sunday, Nov. 15. Among those attending were community volunteers, first responders, village officials and church members who agreed to open their doors to host the individuals, groups, organizations and businesses that came to assist the town.

"This is our way to say thank you for all you have done," Hughey told those who gathered in the church's fellowship hall.

He said the volunteer effort continues and will for months to come.

"Sometimes tragedy brings out the best in people. We saw neighbors helping neighbors and we thank you all," Coal City Mayor Terry Halliday said.

In addition to coordinating the volunteers, Hughey put out a call to the Cozy Blanket Ministry, a program of the Blackhawk Presbytery.

Church members from across the area craft quilts and blankets to assist those in times of need. Hughey has requested 800 blankets to distribute through the community, to date the ministry has provided over 200, and a few of them were handed out on Sunday.

The church also provided those in attendance with healing and recovery booklets developed by the Heart of Illinois United Way following the November 2013 tornado.



Photo by Ann Gill

PASTOR MARK HUGHEY thanked volunteers and first responders for their efforts following the EF-3 tornado that ripped through Coal City in June. Hughey and the congregation at New Hope Presbyterian Church hosted a meal of thanksgiving on Sunday, Nov. 15 to honor the volunteer effort. Hughey and the church staff serve as coordinators for the tornado volunteer effort.



VOLUNTEERS WHO ASSISTED the village of Coal City in the days following the June 22 tornado were presented with a blanket constructed by the Blackhawk Presbytery's Cozy Blanket Ministry.