

Photos by MEATHER HADDON/Herald News

water rose above the hamlet's roofs. The remote region still lacks running water and electrical service. For 16 flood survivors, a battered avocado tree at right served as life support as they clung to its branches while the

depend on lifeline with links to Paterson Dominicans hit hard by Hurricane Noe

money and donations for the thousands makeshift shelters and desperation are displaced by Hurricane Noel, for whom mounted an impressive effort to raise Heather Haddon this week is reporting Dominicans living in New Jersey have damage from the storm and the relief daily realities. Herald News reporter efforts originating in North Jersey. from the Dominican Republic on the

IN THE MO

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> By Heather Haddon Herald News

could escape his bedroom. PIEDRA BLANCA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC -The water from Rio Maimon had risen to Severino Eusebio Mateo's chest before he

swept away. of a nearby avocado tree to keep from being As the water rose, he clung to the branches The 31-year-old scrambled up to his root

a branch of a nearby coconut tree until it gave way, and she was lost to the waters enhim. Maria Altagracia Nuñez, 80, held onto meters downstream. gorged by the downpour of Hurricane Noel For four hours, 15 others clung there with

The floodwaters of Hurricane Noel that

swept people out of their homes three weeks ago have receded in Piedra Blanca, one of the Dominican towns most ravaged by the

start for months, local authorities say. Runpeople in this lush agricultural sector dehundreds of cows or acres of vegetables that bled together on the local basketball court forced to bounce between other people's Construction on replacement housing won't ning water has not returned, nor have the omes and makeshift accommodations cob-But nearly 700 residents remain refugees

pended on.
"It was unbelievable," said Freddy Al-Piedra Blanca who returned to deliver aid to manzar, a Paterson doctor originally from

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Relief: Helping residents recover

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his hometown last weekend. "It's just terrible."

Piedra Blanca, a town of 23,500 wedged between two mountain chains, has few resources to spare. Aside from a cooperative bank and some informal shops, the local livelihood revolves around mining and agriculture. Both sectors are vulnerable to storms.

Late last month, Hurricane Noel hit the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba and the Bahamas, causing millions of dollars in damage across the region. In the Dominican Republic, at least 85 people died as a result of flooding and structural collapses triggered by the storm. Hurricanes often hit this time of year, but the arrival of Noel at night took many by sur-

"I was sleeping when I heard some bumps on the door," said Charo Vidal, a 32-year-old cashier Jose Julio Peña, a local busi-and mother of three, who fled in nessman in Piedra Blanca with Charo Vidal, a 32-year-old cashier her pajamas when the nearby river poured into her bedroom. "I've never been so scared in my life."

Ezeguiel Nuñez, whose mother was one of 12 people here killed in the storm, choked back tears as she remembered the woman who loved to cook rice and beans and attend church.

"My mother was everything to me," she said.

Áfter her own house was destroyed, Nuñez took up shelter in one of the small, subdivided cubicles thrown up in a municipal basketball court, where she now lives indefinitely with 45 other families.

Local officials say they are doing their best to respond to one of the worst disasters in years. Every day, local businesses, health officials and aid organizations arrive with drinking water and bleach to tackle the mud that fills people's homes and threatens to spread contagious diseases.

But with a third of the annual \$21 million municipal budget soaked up in a month of relief work, the local government says it

"To have a shirt, to have food, it is important to people."

JOSE JULIO PENA, businessman in Piedra Blanca

can use all the help possible.

"We're starting at zero," said Dr. Carmen Garcia, the mayor of Piedra Blanca, while sitting in her sparse office on Tuesday, "This destroyed everything."

Åbout 50 families dwell in *ani*ba, or "up there," as people now call the semi-permanent complex.

"We hope to move soon," said Pasquela Gomez, 39, who shares the room with her eight children, one of whom who is blind and severely disabled.

close ties to Dominicans in Paterson, helped collect boxes of clothes, underwear and other supplies for displaced residents. Last Wednesday, he arranged for all the men and boys to get haircuts.

To have a shirt, to have food, it is important for these people," said Peña, estimating that the average monthly salary could barely cover the cost of a simple propane-powered stove.

By Friday, a container of goods collected by Almanzar, the Paterson doctor, should arrive in Piedra Blanca. Peña and other volunteers will distribute a sack of supplies to each person's house.

Vidal, the woman who fled in her pajamas, lost every piece of furniture and baby photo she owned. She tries to stay positive to calm her young children.

"I need to be there for them," said Vidal, wearing a pink blouse donated by one of her co-workers. "They depend on me."

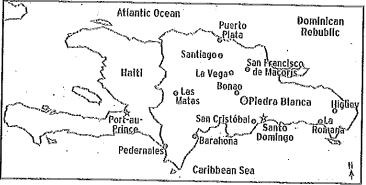
- Heather Haddon's series on storm relief efforts continues on Saturday,



Since Hurricane Noel destroyed her home three weeks ago, Pasqu ter in a municipal basketball court. Her youngest son, lying on a be-

Anguish hits home

Hurrican Noel was the worst storm to strike the Dominican Republic in nearly a decade. In the town of Piedra Blanca, 12 people were killed and more than 700 homes were destroyed by the storm and the floodwaters that followed.



WENDI SEBASTIAN/Herald News