



# ***DISASTER NEWS***

*Loans for Homeowners, Renters and Businesses of All Sizes*

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## ***SBA Honors American Samoa Volunteers Elda Najera-Suisala and Lori Sword For Outstanding Disaster Recovery Efforts***

**SACRAMENTO** – An earthquake with a magnitude of 8.0 struck the Samoan islands on September 29, 2009, triggering a tsunami of 15-foot waves. More than 100 died in American Samoa, a South Pacific island of 77 square miles, and the property damage was widespread.

Although phone service was shut down, Elda Najera-Suisala, who heads a nonprofit group supporting families with special needs children in Pago Pago, still had Internet access. She used Facebook and other social networks to help survivors contact their families and friends on the U.S. mainland. Lori Sword runs a radio station on the island and stayed on-air non-stop, giving information about recovery assistance and providing spiritual support in Samoan and English. The two later teamed up and filled cars with donated food, water, medical supplies and clothing to distribute to families on the island.

The pair reached out to survivors on the island's remote mountain areas. Lori climbed a rugged mountainside and found families who had fled there in fear of being swept away by another tsunami. She and Elda provided care and helped get them back to their villages.

Exhausted at times, Lori and Elda would encourage each other to get some rest, but the suggestions fell on deaf ears. "We both agreed that this was our time to help our people," said Elda.

For their altruistic and far-reaching commitment to the recovery of Pago Pago, Elda Najera-Suisala and Lori Sword will receive the ***2010 Phoenix Award for Outstanding Contributions to Disaster Recovery by a Volunteer.***

"The Phoenix Award is an acknowledgement of an individual's heroic efforts and a recognition of the contributions they make to the recovery of their communities," said SBA Administrator Karen G. Mills. "Elda and Lori displayed tremendous courage and resourcefulness in the aftermath of the flood, and they exemplify the spirit one must have to recover after a disaster like this."

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The Phoenix Award will be presented on May 24, 2010, during the U.S. Small Business Administration's National Small Business Week celebration, May 23-25, at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Washington, D.C. Events can be viewed virtually through SBA's free, live webcasting, which will be accessible at <http://www.nationalsmallbusinessweek.com/>.

Additional information on National Small Business Week, including a detailed schedule and registration information, is online at [www.NationalSmallBusinessWeek.com](http://www.NationalSmallBusinessWeek.com).

Since 1998, the SBA has given Phoenix Awards to business owners, public officials and volunteers who displayed selflessness, ingenuity and tenacity in the aftermath of a disaster, while contributing to the rebuilding of their communities.

The SBA makes low-interest, taxpayer-backed disaster loans to homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes and non-profit organizations of all sizes. More information about the disaster assistance program is available at [www.sba.gov/disasterassistance](http://www.sba.gov/disasterassistance).

For more information about National Small Business Week, visit [www.sba.gov/sbw](http://www.sba.gov/sbw).

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