

Life in LAMORINDA

Lamorinda Prepares to Face Disaster

By Sophie Braccini



CERT volunteers being debriefed by Gordon Nathan

Photo Andy Scheck

“At approximately 06:45-hours on October 25th, Lamorinda experienced an 8.1 earthquake.... Roads leading into and out of the area are closed due to damaged pavement, and power lines blocking some major roads.... You receive word, via a

“runner” from the Lamorinda Disaster Coordinator that all available CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) members are requested to report to the Moraga Commons Park for staging and await further instructions.”

And on that day at 08:00-

hours, 100 CERT volunteers gathered at the Moraga Commons, to participate in the first tri-city drill organized by CERT in cooperation with the police departments, the fire district, and other agencies.

For efficient emergency re-

sponse, the circulation of information is critical. Volunteers were bombarded with one incident after another of all magnitude: an injured person somewhere in town, a car leaking gas in the street, or an apartment building collapsing nearby. The command center received notice, allocated resources and documented its actions. One of the key teams that morning was the medical center. Areas had been set up to triage victims depending on the level of their injuries: a green tarp for minor, yellow for serious but not life threatening, red for requires immediate attention and a black tarp marked the morgue area.

Earlier that morning another 70 volunteers had come to be made up as victims and were ready to be rescued. Ben Thomas, a freshman at Campolindo and member of Boy Scout troop 212 had volunteered. “When we arrived we each chose the scenario to play out,” said Thomas, who had a pole go through his chest.

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Private Donations Help Offset Cuts in Non-Profit Funding

By Jennifer Wake



Volunteers shown from left to right: Vicky Toth, Carolyn Poetzsch, Wendi Shively, Kathleen Guillaume, Diane Sasser, Martha Ross, Julie Corbin, Dick Corbin

Photo Carolyn Bybee

While personal retirement accounts decline in value and financial markets convulse, non-profit organizations must scurry to find funding to keep their doors open and their programs operational.

Youth Homes operates five state-licensed six-bed homes in Lafayette, Concord and Pleasant Hill, including three long-term residential treatment programs and two crisis emergency shelters. It has skirted cuts from the state, so far. But during that same time of flat funding, the organization has seen gas prices, energy costs and healthcare more than double, says Youth Homes Executive Director Stuart McCullough.

With more than 80,000 children in the foster care system in California – 2,000 in Contra Costa County alone – these funds can mean the difference between whether these children go on to pursue meaningful lives or end up on the street.

In the majority of foster care homes and facilities, 40 to 50 percent of kids leave the system – often running away and ending up homeless. An even higher percentage drop out of high school. Youth Homes’ success has been markedly different, with 75 to 80 percent of its participants staying on their plan.

The reason? “We don’t quit on our kids,” McCullough says. “We don’t kick people out.”

Youth Homes not only offers a place for these children and teens to call home, they provide family counseling and psychiatric services, chemical abuse treatment and behavioral coaching – and they never give up on a child.

“The majority of children in the foster care system are there due to abuse and profound neglect,” McCullough says. By the time a child begins to exhibit behaviors consistent with abuse, it’s been several years and the child is severely wounded, McCullough explained.

Typically, if someone is suspected of being abused, they’re carefully assessed, but once it’s determined there is abuse in the home, the steps to remove a child from that home can be traumatic.

“The next night Dad is arrested, the child is taken away to

“We try to step in to be the parent,” McCullough says. “We support them significantly. We try to support this child as he or she matures into young adulthood. After they turn 18, we often have kids come back to join us for Thanksgiving dinner because there’s no place for them to go.”

In 2007, Youth Homes started an AfterCare Program for those who have “aged out” of the foster care system. The AfterCare Program provides therapeutic services, ongoing counseling and financial help for those aged 17 to 22 – services typically cut once a child turns 18.

Unfortunately, all of these programs require money, and current economic conditions are hitting non-profits hard. “Youth Homes, like any non-profit, is focusing on private fund donations,” McCullough says. “It’s highly competitive and a stressful time. In 2009-10, the state budget’s smoke and mirrors will come to roost. Property taxes will decline, and income taxes are going to decline as people are laid off.”

Fortunately, McCullough says the support he’s received from his board members, community outreach efforts and, specifically, the Lamorinda Community has been phenomenal. “Our board personally raised \$50,000 and challenged the community, which responded in kind with four to one donations,” McCullough says. “I could not ask for a more skilled or better board.”

Last month, Youth Homes received a first-time grant of \$70,000 from the HEDCO Foundation for the purchase of three eight-passenger vans to be used to transport Youth Homes children to school, doctor’s appointments, counseling and other activities, and the Lafayette Juniors recently named

Youth Homes as its recipient for the group’s annual November Rummage Sale and its Kitchen Tour in the spring. Other Lamorinda organizations including the Lafayette Garden Club and the Lafayette Chamber have provided volunteer support and resources.

“Unlike most children born into a loving home, these kids were not so lucky – through no fault of their own,” says Nedda Janatpour of Youth Homes. “It is with the support of the community that we can show them that people do care about them.”

“We’ve been blessed by the Lamorinda area,” McCullough added. “It’s been a life-saver, to be perfectly honest.”

For more information about Youth Homes, you can visit its Web site at www.youthhomes.org.

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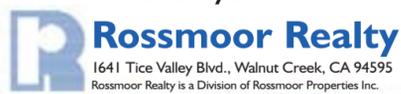
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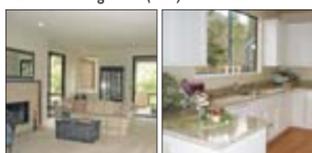
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