



**Independent, locally owned and operated!**

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published November 11th, 2009

## Red Cross and CERT Kick Off a Partnership at SMC

By Sophie Braccini

In recent weeks, fourteen Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteers trained with the American Red Cross (ARC) at Saint Mary's College. The exercises focused on setting up and operating an emergency shelter. This partnership is a first in the Bay Area and ARC hopes to duplicate such collaborations for communities to become more self sufficient in case of an emergency.

"Partnering with the CERT volunteers was a natural thing to do," said Brianna Taylor, a Resident Partner Service Lead with ARC. "Those people are already trained to respond to emergencies, and it took only four Saturdays to train them to set up and operate a shelter," she explained. The training was done with Lamorinda in mind but the volunteers could be asked to serve in other locations. CERT and Saint Mary's College have an agreement allowing CERT trainings to be held on campus.

"The overall objective was to train us as fully certified American Red Cross Disaster Volunteers who could potentially be deployed to a disaster anywhere in the U.S.," said long time Moraga resident Dick Olsen, who participated in the training. "It essentially involved learning the basics of post-disaster Mass Care." Olsen explained that the concept of this new, experimental relationship between CERT and ARC is that in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, a CERT member would first take care of his/her family, followed by the immediate neighborhood and community. CERT volunteers would then assist with Mass Care needs, particularly sheltering and feeding the victims of the disaster and helping them get ready to re-establish their lives as soon as possible.

"A shelter can be operated with twelve volunteers during three shifts of eight hours, a total of 36 people," explained Carol Crawford, the only paid staff for ARC in all of Contra Costa County. "In an emergency you can always count on the community; during Katrina we had a lot people coming in and we trained them before sending them to help. Training locals ahead of time insures a faster response and a better and more consistent the level of service," Crawford said.

ARC has signed more than 250 statements of understanding with Contra Costa governments for shelters in case of emergency. "We do not divulge their locations because depending on the type, location and extend of the emergency we will decide to use different sites," said Taylor, but she could confirm that ARC has signed an agreement with the Acalanes Union High School District. "Schools are a convenient place to set up shelters," she added, "They have large gymnasiums, as well as toilets and showers and sometimes a kitchen."

The Saint Mary's campus would also be logical shelter site. "We do not have an agreement yet with the College for sheltering," said Crawford, "but just considering the number of students on site, it would be a good idea to consider something there."

On November 8th, the last Saturday of their training, the volunteers learned about psychological first aid. They will also take an all-day ARC CPR/AED (automated external defibrillator) and First Aid course in Concord on Saturday, November 14. "The level of dedication of the volunteers was remarkable," said Crawford, "after this first success we will expand the training to other Contra Costa locations."

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA