

Coming Together to Build a Shelter

By Cathy Dausman



Standing on left, instructor Rick Palmer

Photo Cathy Dausman

Twenty one Moragans abandoned the shelter of their cozy homes on a rainy Saturday morning to learn how to manage a temporary shelter in the event of a disaster affecting their town. They were all volunteers taking a Red Cross shelter training session at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church (MVPC).

The session was organized by Ken Tom of Moraga. Tom, a volunteer partner liaison for Red Cross said it's been at least two years since the last Lamorinda workshop.

Attendees at this session included members of the local Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), two churches (MVPC and St. Monica), Moraga Recreation Director Jay Ingram and Robert Priebe, Moraga's Chief of Police.

Red Cross instructors Briana Taylor and Rick Palmer led an interactive workshop presentation on a shelter's basic "three S's" –the site, the stuff, and the staff, where the legal responsibility rests to shelter citizens - the government - and various relief levels, ranging from a house fire displacing a single family for a short time to natural disasters like a large earthquake or hurricane. Much of the current training material came from Red Cross experiences after Hurricane Katrina.

Taylor, Palmer and class tackled the realities of opening, running and closing a shelter, housing and feeding its residents, coping with and diffusing stress, squelching rumors and responding to media, all with the expectation of having the shelter up and running in as little as two hours.

Volunteers developed an appreciation for myriad logistical challenges. They learned that folks get hungry before they get sleepy and that pizza will likely be the first hot meal offered to

shelter residents. They learned it takes 25 volunteers to staff a 300 person shelter round the clock. Students also received an eighty page manual for Shelter Operations. Shelter operations, not shelter locations.

Locations are never disclosed ahead of time, says Carole Crawford, Manager of Disaster Services for the American Red Cross in Contra Costa County. That could be dangerous, as each potential shelter must be inspected and evaluated for safety before it is opened. Crawford says Red Cross likes to look for facilities with

showers and kitchens on site.

Upon completing the course, each trainee still said they would be willing to volunteer as a shelter manager for the Red Cross— Neighbors helping neighbors.

No training sessions are currently scheduled in Lafayette or Orinda, but a second Shelter Training session will be held February 11, 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church, 10 Moraga Valley Lane. Enrollment is limited. For more information, e-mail Ken Tom at tkentom@aol.com.

Red Cross Fast Facts

Red Cross allies itself with CERT in Lamorinda, in what Red Cross calls a partnership training program.

Moraga's Red Cross volunteer liaison is Ken Tom.

Lafayette's Red Cross volunteer liaison is Brianna Taylor.

Tom and Taylor are joint volunteer liaison for Orinda as well.

- Red Cross in Contra Costa County falls under the Golden Gateway Region.
- The San Francisco Bay Area boasts 400,000 Red Cross trained volunteers.
- Contra Costa County has 220 volunteers serving a population of about two million.
- Approximately 40 primary shelters (capacity 300) and 90 large shelters (capacity 100) are scattered throughout Contra Costa County. Red Cross is actively engaged in adding to these facilities.
- Red Cross maintains 20 supply containers in the county. One container holds shelter necessities for 300 people; eight containers hold necessities for 200 people; and 11 containers hold necessities for 100 people: (one cot per person and two blankets per cot).
- Moraga has a container.
- Lafayette has a container.

Currently scheduled Red Cross Partner Exercises within the county:

- San Ramon April 26
- Antioch TBD (likely August)
- Rossmoor October

For more information, or to volunteer, go online at www.redcrossbayarea.org.

Or contact Carole Crawford, (925) 603-7414; crawfordc@usa.redcross.org. C. Dausman

Orinda Village Seniors Tackle Emergency Preparedness

Not without challenges for those who speak English as a second language

By Cathy Dausman



Josephine Cao takes her turn

Photo Cathy Dausman

An emergency preparedness class in Orinda is nothing unusual. But imagine trying to teach basic fire or medical training to senior citizens when their native language is a Russian or Chinese dialect, Spanish or Farsi. That is the challenge Rebecca Kunzman faced recently. Kunzman is a Lamorinda Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) instructor whose newest class at Orinda Senior Village has 18 participants, many of whom understand only limited English.

"All the students read English but about half do not understand the lec-

tures entirely or even very little," she said. And a language barrier is just one challenge the group faced. Some can't lift heavy objects or move very quickly due to advanced age. As one senior commented, they "can't do things young, athletic CERTs can do, but they can do some things..."

Maryam Mojaver has lived at Orinda Village for 18 months. Her native language is Farsi, but Mojaver also needs a hearing aid. The advice she gave to those teaching the classes was: "speak slowly and loud."

Kunzman and fellow instructors Duncan Seibert, Gordon Nathan,

Robert Lipp and Fred Lothrop had hoped to locate volunteer interpreters to translate the oral portion of the class for their Chinese and Persian students. They had no luck. After contacting the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and state of California resource sites the instructors managed to obtain a written Spanish and Chinese dialect version of *Putting Down Roots in Earthquake Country* (<http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/2005/15/>; also available in Vietnamese and Korean). That still left Kunzman with only a partial, hand-written Farsi translation and no Russian translation at all. Kunzman says the very sources she asked for help asked her to send *them* any translations she located.

Still, the seniors persisted, sitting politely through the lecture portion of their emergency training. Then it was outside to practice using fire extinguishers. Some found the extinguishers too heavy to lift, but those who did pulled the pin, squeezed the handle and extinguished the practice fire in seconds, beaming from ear to ear. They found that a smile translates easily into any language.



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