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In-person CERT classes resume in Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty



CERT members at a recent training session.
Photo provided

After a hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) classes will resume, in person, in the Orinda library auditorium in January. This will be the second live class in the Lamorinda area; the first class, which was offered in Lafayette, just completed training Nov. 4.

Lamorinda CERT had just finished a class in March of 2020, just before things shut down for the pandemic. Since resuming in-person training, CERT is following all COVID-19 protocols. All participants must be fully vaccinated and must show proof with a QR code. They will wear masks and sit six feet apart. The only exception to the masking requirement is for the instructors, who are far from the trainees and even from the other instructors.

Nevertheless, Registrar Julie Sparks notes that the situation changes frequently, and, if necessary, the Emergency Management Agency requires at least 16 hours of in-person training.

Trainees will be coming back to a significantly updated program. At the end of 2019, FEMA published major changes to the CERT program. Lamorinda CERT Program Manager Duncan Seibert was on the Contra Costa County CERT Coalition subcommittee to implement the changes. A doctor from Walnut Creek updated the medical portion of the training, and the HAM radio operators updated the section on communications, Sparks said. FEMA recommended an updated font for the slide deck, so Seibert updated all the slides that will be used throughout the county, and also by Alameda County and San Francisco.

The local CERTs take the FEMA material and specialize it to focus on those disasters that are more likely to happen here, so the local classes focus less on tornados and hurricanes, and more on earthquakes and fires. Although the section on triage, the assignment of degrees of urgency to wounds or illnesses to decide the order of treatment of a large number of patients or casualties,

was cut from FEMA, local groups are allowed to include additional sections. Lamorinda CERT has added back the section on triage, as well as keeping sections on pets and adding a section on communications.

Lamorinda CERT Public Information Officer Virginia Merrifield noted that CPR is not included in the CERT training, and never has been, although people are encouraged to seek it separately. CPR classes are offered by several groups, including the Red Cross, which is the main provider, but also by the YMCA, Adult Ed, and Parks and Rec, for example.

During the pandemic, Lamorinda CERT strived to fulfill its mission, which is to do the greatest good for the greatest number. CERT members volunteered at COVID vaccination sites and testing sites, sold and distributed water drums and fire extinguishers, and assisted at events such as the Lafayette Reservoir Run, spending hours in the rain that day.

A lot of work continued behind the scenes. In addition to revising the slide deck, time was also spent educating instructors. Monthly Zoom meetings were very well attended and allowed CERTs to keep their skills somewhat refreshed, according to Merrifield. The meetings occur at 7 p.m. the second Monday of each month, except in December. Currently on Zoom, the meetings usually last about an hour. The convenient meetings have seen a great turnout. While in-person meetings would have had 25 to 50 people in person, the Zoom meetings have attracted from 45 to 60 or more people on Zoom. On two occasions they had over 100 attendees, and had to use the MOFD Zoom license.

The new class in Orinda will start on Jan. 12, 2022 and run through March 9, meeting on Wednesday nights from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. in the Orinda library auditorium. The penultimate class is a hands-on drill conducted at the Contra Costa County Fire District training grounds in Concord. The drill allows the new trainees to go through a series of training exercises to put into practice the skills learned.

Thus far, 11 people have registered, and the class size is limited to 50. Before the pandemic, class size was up to 60, but CERT is returning to in-person training slowly. There will be a ratio of 1 instructor for every 12 students. The first in-person class was very small; although 45 persons signed up, only about 20 actually attended.

Persons wishing to sign up for the next training can do so on the Lamorinda CERT website where there is a register for training button, or by emailing Julie Sparks at registrar@lamorindacert.org

CERT Website: www.lamorindacert.org/training/classes/

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

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