

Medics: 'We stepped in because we had nothing'

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The group of 23 local volunteer surgeons, nurses, counselors and other health care specialists is the only one of its kind in Clatsop County, and only one of four on the Oregon Coast. It has been slowly growing and training to be a team that can be deployed to address medical needs in an emergency.

The concept of a medical reserve corps is nothing new. The corps, a national network of volunteers charged with improving the health and safety of their communities, has existed for decades. More than 900 groups are registered throughout the United States. There is also a statewide registry of health care professionals who can be deployed in an emergency.

But Cannon Beach is a part of a small but growing number of cities taking emergency management practices into their own hands, Clatsop County Emergency Manager Tiffany Brown said. It is unusual for a city to take on operational training and supply requirements of a medical reserve corps — most are operated through a county-wide public health authority.

It's even more unusual for a city of 1,700 people to do so.

"(There is) a general trend down the coast and rural counties in general to begin local planning and commit local resources in anticipation that the traditional, perhaps more regional, resources will not be available," Brown said.

'Boots on the ground'

The idea to start a medical reserve corps in town came out of the greater need to have more disaster response volunteers, since a majority of city staff and first responders do not live in Cannon Beach.



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
A volunteer group in Cannon Beach has assembled over 4,000 medical supply items that can be distributed in case of an emergency.

"We already had a (Community Emergency Response Team) program, but we were missing the specialists after an emergency," Cannon Beach Emergency Management Consultant Stacy Burr said. "This is really about getting boots on the ground to multiply medical services. Because when you only have a couple of paramedics in town during an emergency, you are pretty much overwhelmed."

Part of the drive came from medical reserve corps coordinator Lila Wickham, who was inspired to launch a unit in Cannon Beach after participating in an earthquake and tsunami drill at Camp Rilea. Wickham was concerned about the town's lack of a hospital to provide medical services, particularly during emergencies.

The need for local resources was bolstered by memories of the Great Coastal Gale in 2007, which led to flooding

and road closures that isolated Cannon Beach for days, preventing agencies like the Red Cross from responding. The county has a variety of public-health related cache sites, but none specifically in Cannon Beach.

"We stepped in, because we had nothing," Wickham said.

These needs are part of the reason why the corps has a stronger focus on training to be "medics in the field," Burr said, rather than the more general charges of a public health agency.

Wickham and fellow coordinator Bob Wayne, a retired surgeon, now work with Burr and Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn to conduct state-prescribed training on handling how to triage a mass casualty scene, drownings, shelter management and other first aid.

When they aren't training, Wickham works to grow their stockpile by writing grants

for supplies or organizing the donations they receive from Columbia Memorial Hospital and Providence Seaside Hospital. In the cache sites, shelves are stacked high with meticulously organized boxes of supplies like bandages, hemostatic agents, gauze and aspirin.

"This is really different from the hospital environment most of us are used to," Wickham said of the volunteers. "Treating people in an austere environment has a whole new set of challenges. We work off a nationally standardized triage system. You can't spend time on people who are probably going to die. You don't have all the conveniences that you would in a hospital. It's just not how we think in a clinical environment. And it's important to train like it."

'Different dynamic'

Running a program like



Bins of medical supplies and other items line the shelves of a storage facility near Cannon Beach.



Some of the items in the storage facility include supplies stockpiled by private citizens.

this in such a small town does run some risks.

"If it was run through a health authority, they have a larger footprint. So if one of your team members moved away, you could still have continuity because the institution has a larger pool to draw from," she said. "Everyone here is a volunteer."

But that same shortcoming is also what Wickham attributes to the corps' early success.

"I think it also makes you more impassioned if you choose to do this. You won't be reimbursed," she said. "It's

interesting to be in a team with your neighbors doing this. One day I see you around town, the next day you are playing a victim in a mass casualty drill. It's just a different dynamic."

Burr hopes to grow the number of volunteers as quickly as they did the supplies, inviting professionals from surgeons to social workers to join, she said. They also need to bolster their pediatric and veterinary supplies, such as baby formula and diapers.

"In the end, all we have to rely on in an emergency is who is there," Wickham said.



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson
An Amtrak train derailed in December above Interstate 5 in DuPont, Wash.

Engineer: Investigation could take up to two years

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Three people were killed and dozens of others were hurt Dec. 18 on the route to Portland. The train was carrying 85 passengers and crew members as it made its inaugural run along the fast, new 15-mile bypass route.

The summary said the engineer and conductor were in the lead locomotive as the conductor underwent training and familiarized himself with the new route. Both said they felt well-rested. The engineer said he didn't feel distracted

by the conductor being in the locomotive.

Neither man has been identified by NTSB. However, the summary says the engineer was a 55-year-old man hired by Amtrak in 2004 as a conductor before being promoted to locomotive engineer in 2013.

The conductor, a 48-year-old man, said the ride marked the first time the two men had worked together and there was minimal conversation between them.

He said he looked up from his paperwork after hear-

ing the engineer mumble out loud, just before the derailment, then sensed the train was going airborne.

The conductor was hired by Amtrak as an assistant conductor in 2010 and was promoted to conductor the following year. He said he attended a job briefing with the engineer, going over general track bulletins and other items at the start of the shift.

Garrick Freeman was identified as the conductor after filing a lawsuit against Amtrak, claiming the company failed to provide a safe

work environment. He said he suffered multiple broken ribs, a fractured clavicle and serious internal injuries during the derailment.

NTSB said it will continue the investigation by comparing the crewmember accounts with information gained from videos and a data recorder, and will consider human performance and operations, as well as signals and train control, and track, engineering and mechanical factors.

The investigation could take up to two years.

Ousley: Candidates have until March 6 to file for primary

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A suspense and young adult fiction author, she serves on the Seaside Public Library Foundation Board.

Ousley volunteers with progressive activist group Indivisible North Coast, canvassing for the recently passed health care ballot measure and trying to increase voter registration. Another focus of the group has been getting more people to run for office.

"I see running for office as a way to expand my service to my community," Ousley wrote on her campaign website.

Among her values are making health care and edu-

cation more accessible and affordable.

"I'm concerned about the environment, protecting our gorgeous coast and forests and advocating for clean, renewable energy," she wrote, expressing concern about potential offshore drilling.

The state should establish caps on greenhouse gas emissions, require emitters to purchase allowances and use the revenue to invest in renewable energy and communities affected by global warming, she wrote. "District 32 could benefit from these measures, and we have the potential to lead these efforts."

Candidates have until March 6 to file for the May primary.

Hotel: Plans for further development scrapped

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and, most recently, the Port of Astoria. The tank was likely placed more than 70 years ago, but knowledge of its existence was lost somewhere between the ownership turnover, West said.

"It's just sitting there and no one knew it was under there," hotel spokeswoman Donna Quinn said. "It would have been nice for them to have disclosed that through the years."

Robert "Jake" Jacob bought the docks in the 1990s, repaired one of them and built the luxury hotel on top. Water surrounding the tank is leased — rather than owned — by the hotel.

Initial plans for further development on a dock next to the hotel — more rooms, a restaurant and a shop — were scrapped due to high costs, West said. The oil tank is located under that dock.

The hotel will be involved in paying for the cleanup, and while the total cost is

unknown, management fears it could be substantial, Quinn said. A number of prospective guests have even called the hotel, which has been open during the cleanup, to check if it had closed.

"We're just bidding our time and hoping this doesn't shoot us in the head," West said.

Situated along the river, the hotel is prized as a destination for its picturesque views. The hotel has coordinated with environmental groups during the spill.

"We really take our responsibility for the health of the estuary seriously," Quinn said.

The hotel has raised questions about whether a similar event could happen in other former cannery sites around Astoria. Once a booming cannery town, many of the piers that used to house the operations have been left in ruin.

"Who knows, unfortunately, what could be underneath all the canneries by piers?" Quinn said.