

Red Cross to hold trainings, outreach in spring

By Lyra Fontaine
For EO Media Group

After the Manzanita tornado in October, residents like Larry Wiedenhoft, an emergency volunteer corps of Nehalem Bay member, sprang into action. Volunteers responded to the scene in various ways, from watching traffic, removing trees and finding shelter for displaced people to helping the Red Cross conduct an official damage assessment.

"The community was there within minutes," said Monique Dugaw, communications director for the American Red Cross Cascades Region. Manzanita's recovery process has been "outstanding" due to the immediate response of trained volunteers, she added.

"It was amazing because everyone just came and did whatever job needed to be done," said Wiedenhoft, who has American Red Cross, Community Emergency Response Team and emergency medical services training. "We

all know each other and we know what each other can do."

To strengthen its partnership with Cannon Beach, Red Cross will hold a general recruitment session on March 30 at the Cannon Beach Chamber Hall from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Residents will learn from Red Cross disaster program managers about the organization, how the training works and can sign up to volunteer.

"We believe individuals in Cannon Beach are resilient and well-prepared," Dugaw said. "We want to make sure we tap into that preparedness and strengthen our community partnerships by offering Red Cross training and engaging individuals who are already prepared themselves."

The Cascades region helps an average of three families each day who are affected by disasters, such as home fires and storms. After a recent home fire, the Red Cross opened a shelter so that 30 individuals displaced from their homes could have access to food, water, showers and an overnight stay.



Members of the Cascade Red Cross. The Red Cross will be conducting training in Cannon Beach on March 30.

The Red Cross will train Cannon Beach volunteers on disaster action, preparedness and sheltering displaced people after an emergency, such as a tsunami.

Disaster response training might include deploying to scenes like home fires to assist families with food, shelter, clothing, mental health resources and other immedi-

ate basic needs. Preparedness education trains residents to deliver presentations within their community, install smoke alarms, put together disaster supply kits and other

actions that increase readiness.

Dugaw said the Red Cross will form relationships with Medical Reserve Corps and CERT.

"The more people that we have cross-trained in disaster response and recovery, the more resilient communities can become for disasters of all kind," Dugaw said.

"I think for our little rural communities, we all need to be cross-trained to do everything," Wiedenhoft said. "If something happens, it might take awhile for help to arrive. Any community can train volunteers to do the stuff that we did."

After the tornado, which damaged 128 structures, Wiedenhoft remembers seeing downed trees and power lines and planned to help with medical response. When he learned no one was hurt, he switched modes to taking care of people who were displaced from their home. He helped relocate them to a safe place and eventually to the local Red Cross shelter at Calvary Bible Church.

For Gearhart firefighter, it's 55 years and counting

Blissett has seen tragedy, enjoyed friends

Jon Blissett joined the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department in 1962, and today is the department's oldest active member.

Blissett looks back at 55 years of firefighting and the changes he's seen in the community.

Q: How old are you?

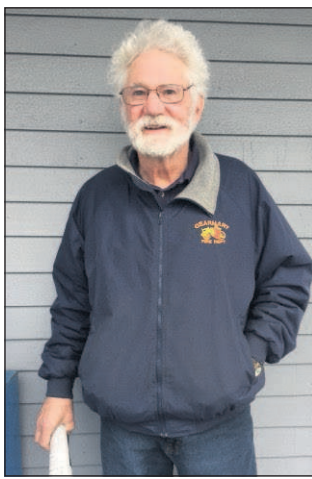
I'll be 80 this time next year. I feel great.

Q: Tell me about your background in Gearhart.

I owned the Chevron gas station in Gearhart right next to the fire station. Then the DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality) got into the situation with the tanks. They were old, they wanted lots of repairs. I closed in 1992.

Q: I heard something about oil company executives getting worked up over the station's decor?

I painted whales on the gas station building. They got crazy. They said we're taking your dealership away from you. I said what difference does that make? I can get the same damn gas and don't have to do what you guys are telling me to do. After that I didn't take Standard Oil cards, I took Bank of America cards. It didn't make any difference to me.



R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Jon Blissett has served with the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department for 55 years.

Q: What have you been doing since 1992?

I was a fireman and I clam dug, commercial clam digger. I'm married. I have three boys. One boy lives in the area. He's a captain on the Tidewater Barge Lines. The other two are out of the area, one in Seattle and the other's in Grants Pass.

Q: What kind of activities do you do with the Gearhart Fire Department?

I have been there so long I don't really have a desire to go in and breathe a lot of smoke. I feel like I was in it. We do have younger guys that are really into it, and it's really good they are.

Q: Things were different when you started?

You might say they were

different, but jumping on the trucks and going to the fires was the same. The difference is the improvements between now and then. We didn't have the modern Plectrons we have now in our home. We had a siren. The siren would go off. We'd respond to the station. I'd be the first one. Pick up the phone and find out where the fire was, mark it on the bulletin board and then get up and go.

Q: Serious fires?

John Osburn, who owned the Gearhart Hotel, was my uncle. That was quite a building. I worked there in high school. There were fires there. The golf course across the street caught on fire. That was a big one.

One time, we were called into a structure fire. There was smoke coming out of the roof and the windows were black. All the firemen — including myself — thought it was a real serious fire. So we pulled the ladder out and got out the chainsaw and started to drill a hole on the roof to vent and I opened the door and there was just smoke in the building that wasn't like hot smoke, just smoke. There was no smoke coming out of the chimney, but there was a fire in the stove. Well, a squirrel had got up into the chimney and built a nest and plugged up all the ventilation for the fire to go up out of the chimney. Smoke was just filling the room.

Q: Who were some of the memorable people you've worked with at the department?

Memorable firemen — there were a lot of them. There's a plaque in front of the firehouse of all the people who built the station. Deny Holmes. Bill Heckenberg. They're still alive. They're older than me. Randy Curs owned the grocery store. When the siren rang, he and I would race down there to see who got there first. The story got out that one time the fire siren rang and I got halfway down to the station and came back and got my car and drove back to the station — which was a block.

Q: Did you ever lose anybody?

Yeah ... yeah. We lost a small child in the house right

next to the gas station. That's not something you want to keep in the back of your mind.

Q: Any moments you couldn't deal with?

I could deal with all of it. The guy on the beach who covered himself with gas, and lit himself on fire, was burning when we got there. Some things we don't want to remember.

Q: How long are you going to continue to volunteer?

That's a good question. I think that's up to somebody else. The guys are really good guys. There's always a few ... but it seems if they're there long enough, they get straightened out. It's more or less just being able to provide a service rather than how long I want to be there. I'll know.

— R.J. Marx

Alaska man dies along Highway 26

Seaside Signal

An Alaska man died Tuesday morning after he was struck by a car on U.S. Highway 26 just east of Seaside.

The 44-year-old man from Ketchikan, Alaska, was standing in the roadway shortly before 7 a.m. when he was hit by a car traveling eastbound.

Kathy Barnes, 43, of Seaside, was driving a 2011 Subaru Legacy when she struck the pedestrian. Oregon State Police have not yet released the man's name.

The highway was closed for about four hours following the incident.

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