

# RED ALERTS!



Keeping our volunteer partners engaged and informed



## ON THE HORIZON

■ National Preparedness Month, September, [www.ready.gov/september](http://www.ready.gov/september).



## DEPLOYED

**TONI TAYLOR**, July, Marshalltown, Iowa, disability integration manager, tornado response; second deployment, August, Maui, Hawaii, hurricane response.

**ABBIE COLUSSI**, August, Middleton, Calif., disaster mental health service associate, wild-fire response.



# 31

Disaster responses in July. Families helped: 38.



# 16

Volunteers joined us in July.



## MILESTONES

**CARLA DALKE**, 10 years

**CURTIS PETRIK**, 5 years

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: SHELLIE CREVELING OF CASCADE

# 'I love giving back to the community'

*Spurred by tragedy, Creveling seizes the opportunity to make her hometown safer*

It was a hectic 48 hours for Montana Red Cross volunteer Shellie Creveling. After helping close a flooding evacuation shelter in Choteau, Creveling had just gotten back home to Cascade. Ten minutes later, the phone rang. It was a duty officer reporting a house fire in Great Falls. Creveling hit the road again, helping a family of four before returning home that evening. She wouldn't be there long though — she had to be back in Great Falls the next morning to help another volunteer open a flooding evacuation shelter by 5 a.m.

By the end, she was exhausted.

"That's what I signed up for, but I never imagined it would be in such rapid succes-



In May, Shellie Creveling and her team installed 200 smoke alarms in more than 100 homes in Cascade.

sion," Creveling said with a laugh.

"I love giving back to the community. I love being involved and making people's

SEE CREVELING, PAGE 2

## Meet new Red Cross volunteer recruitment specialist Gini Kay

A few pleasant surprises awaited Gini Kay when she joined the American Red Cross volunteer services team last month.

"I didn't know there

was a branch of the Red Cross that helps our armed forces and provides assistance to military families so they can have a connection with loved ones overseas," she said. "My gosh, this is awesome! Why aren't we telling more people about this?"

"I'm also surprised how big disaster services is and all the different layers that are involved."

As the region's new volunteer recruiting specialist, much of Gini's job will involve just that — letting potential volunteers know about all the wide array of services Red Cross provides and ways they can jump in and lend a hand. Based in Missoula, Gini updates websites, helps volunteers through the initial application process and will attend community events where she will share the Red Cross story.



"One of the things I like about the Red Cross is we have all this information, and we know how to use it to help people," she said.

Gini comes to the Red Cross from the Center for Environmental Health Sciences in Missoula where she worked for nine years as a research assistant. The biomedical research center studies how exposure to things like asbestos, wood smoke and second-hand smoke affect lung function.

Born and raised in Missoula, Gini has three degrees from the University of Montana: a bachelor's in biology, a bachelor's in psychology and a master's in public health.

She is married and has a 13-year-old daughter.

In her free time, Gini likes to hike, spend time at the lake and do home-improvement projects on their "fixer-upper."

Welcome Gini to the team at [virginia.kay@redcross.org](mailto:virginia.kay@redcross.org).

— Matt Ochsner

## For this volunteer, it's all about the people

With her kids off to college, Cindy Bender found herself with more time on her hands, time she wanted to use to help those around her. She signed up to become an American Red Cross volunteer in 2004, and not long after, Bender and four others from Montana deployed to Pensacola, Fla., to help with an

emergency shelter after several major hurricanes hit the state including hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne. It would be the first of several Red Cross hurricane deployments for Bender.

That initial experience helping



Cindy Bender, back row, left, in a Red Cross hat, with her DAT group.

SEE BENDER, PAGE 2

# Bender: Deployments create memories

people in Pensacola spurred the Helena woman to join her local disaster action team. She eventually became chairman before stepping back to a team lead position so she could work more directly with people. Deployments following Hurricanes Ike and Katrina have shaped her personally, Bender said, with the people she served teaching her “how to be a better person.” She also drew inspiration by watching these families keep their heads up and looking forward during such difficult times.

A few Red Cross experiences through the years have stuck with her, like the time a shelter in Louisiana was struggling and Bender and others were called upon to get it up and running again.

There was also the time a Dollar Store in Poplarville, Miss., had been shuttered following a hurricane, and the owner gave local disaster emergency services teams and Red Cross volunteers permission to go in and take everything they needed to help residents. As they were gathering supplies, several police cars pulled

up. The officers thought Bender and the others were looters and almost arrested them until they realized they had permission to be there.

But amidst all these adventures, it’s the people she’s met during these deployments Bender remembers most. They include complete strangers who helped her run a shelter and soon became lifelong friends. She fondly remembers the professionalism of the fire departments, police officers and FEMA workers who always showed gratitude toward the Red Cross. And it’s the people she’s helped, including the 78-year-old woman who wrote her a beautiful thank you letter full of hope and promise after she lost everything she owned.

Besides her hurricane deployments, Bender also helps families closer to home. During the flooding in Montana this spring, Bender worked closely with other organizations through the Montana chapter of the Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters. They met regularly to discuss community needs and then divided up the responses

based on strengths of each organization.

One organization provided sandbags, for example, another drywall and another masks and gloves. Bender said she’s especially thankful for Ted Koenig, a Red Cross disaster program manager, who was on the phone during those flooding meetings and is “always on speed dial” to respond to questions.

Koenig is also grateful for Bender and her positive attitude during difficult times.

“There are many things that make Cindy a great volunteer, but the ones that come most to mind are her selflessness and enthusiasm,” he said. “She does each of these things with a contagious enthusiasm that lifts the spirits of our clients, our partners and her peers.”

That’s just part of being on a great team, Bender said.

“A big hug to my fellow Red Crossers,” she said. “We could not complete our mission without each other.”

— Red Cross volunteer writer  
Steven Potraz

# Creveling: 102 homes made safer

lives a little easier when they’re going through a tough time.”

Born and raised in Minnesota, Creveling moved to Montana when she was 14. A “caregiver by nature,” Creveling spent time as a volunteer EMT and joined the Red Cross in 2016. Since then, Creveling has responded to at least eight house fires, assisted at two emergency shelters in the Browning area — one following a severe winter storm and the other during a wildfire — and responded to flooding this spring.

One of her brightest Red Cross moments came in May when she organized a Sound the Alarm smoke alarm installation event in Cascade — a grassroots success story spurred by tragedy.

“There was a house fire in Cascade where a gentleman passed away and that’s when it occurred to me that we should do a smoke alarm event here,” Creveling said. “A lot of times we do programs in bigger cities like Billings and Boise but the rural areas are just as important.”

So Creveling seized the opportunity, rounding up supplies, creating a map, canvassing neighborhoods, recruiting volunteers and talking with her neighbors.

“It started taking on a life of its own,” she said. “It was easier for me because I have been in this community for almost 40 years. I knew who to talk to at the local newspaper, city hall, the city council members and the Cascade volunteer fire chief.”

Before they were done, Creveling and her small volunteer team raised \$2,700 in donations from local businesses and installed 200 alarms in 100 homes — an impressive feat considering Cascade is a community of 700 people.

“We were shocked by the number of homes that didn’t have any working alarms,” she said. “We went into a couple trailers with five kids and no alarms. None at all.”



Volunteers Shellie Creveling and Cristian Hernandez teamed up to open a shelter in Great Falls in July in response to flooding.

“Shellie absolutely took the Sound the Alarm initiative and ran with it,” said Ted Koenig, Red Cross disaster program manager in western Montana. “The small, closely knit community of Cascade also demonstrates that big things can happen wherever.”

One of the families they helped has three daughters who are hearing impaired. Their parents had set off their alarms before to see how the girls would respond and at least one hadn’t stirred a bit.

Now each has a bed-shaker alarm that will vibrate and wake them during a fire.

“That family was extremely grateful,” Creveling said.

Creveling has seen plenty of gratitude during her time at the Red Cross.

“One of the fires I responded to the woman had lost her husband,” she said. “Here she was, she had just lost her husband and her home, everything, and she was thankful for what we could provide her. It was just a drop in the bucket considering what she had just gone through but she was so grateful to us for helping her deal with it all.”

Creveling deserves recognition

for all she does for Red Cross and the families they serve, especially her work during those crazy 48 hours back in June, Koenig said.

“I commend Shellie for the tireless attitude she demonstrated in those intense moments,” he said. “It can be easy to grow fatigued or have frustration set in. But Shellie maintained the spirit of volunteer service and humanity that motivates me and others around her.”

On the heels of the Cascade smoke alarm installs, a fire chief in another small town has reached out to Creveling to do a similar event in his community. She credits much of the Cascade event’s success to her husband, Keith.

“I couldn’t have done it without him,” she said. “He just knows everybody in town from being born and raised here. It was very satisfying for him to be helping people he grew up with.”

And at the end of the day, Creveling said, that’s what the Red Cross is all about.

“Nothing would be possible without a good team,” she said. “At the Red Cross, it’s an absolute team effort.”

— Matt Ochsner