

RED ALERTS!



Keeping our Red Cross volunteer workforce engaged and informed



ON THE HORIZON

- February – [Black History Month](#)
- February – [American Heart Month](#)
- February – [Cancer Prevention Month](#)
- Feb. 4 – [World Cancer Day](#)
- Feb. 12 – Phlebotomist Recognition Week begins
- Feb. 14 – Valentine’s Day
- Feb. 16 – [National Caregivers Day](#)
- Feb. 16 – President’s Day
- March – Red Cross Month



39

Disaster responses in January. People helped: **168**



MILESTONES

LINDA HUDSON, 15 years

KIM ACKLEY, 15 years

LINDA RAINE, 10 years

AMY JOYNER, 5 years

ELINOR OLSON, 5 years

DR. BART HILL, 5 years

LOIS MENZIES, 5 years

MARY STURGEON, 5 years



IN THE NEWS

[Red Cross volunteer drivers save lives in rural Montana](#)

[Great Falls woman saved by blood transfusions](#)

[Red Cross blood-mobile counters shortage](#)

[Community rallies to help those displaced by apartment fire](#)



“She’s just a sweetheart all the time, and to everybody she meets,” Dave Warner says of his wife, and Red Cross partner, Claudia. “And so that kind of endears me to her.”

HUMANITARIAN HEARTS

Caring for community and each other go hand-in-hand for East Idaho sweethearts

Good friends are hard to come by. But a perfect partner? Even harder. Fortunately, Dave and Claudia Warner would end up with both after being set up in 1979.

“They were telling me that I needed to meet her, and she needed to meet me,” remarked Dave as both beamed at the memory. “And so, they got us at places where we saw each other before we actually met the first time.”

A dash of meet-cute magic here, a sprinkle of scheduling by mutual friends there and poof! The pair hit it off.

While sparks flew, skepticism trailed closely behind; both had previously been married and had children. But love waits for no one, and they quickly fell for each other.

“Going through a divorce, you have different things you look for in somebody, and he embodied all of the wonderful things I was looking for,” Claudia said.

Soon after their marriage, a new love blossomed in the form of a blended family. Dave

SEE HEARTS, PAGE 3

Sharing time, talent and love

Margie Wherritt and Jo Ericksen found themselves caught in the crosshairs of Cupid’s bow one fateful day in Minnesota.

“We met at a community volunteer event and the rest is history!” they wrote. “(Jo) was getting her master’s degree in marriage and family

therapy, and I was working for a nonprofit lobbying for Minnesota dairy farmers.”

Thirty-five years later, the lovebirds are inseparable. They’ve built a beautiful family and raised three children in an environment of love

SEE LOVE, PAGE 3



Lovingly referred to as the “Red Cross twofers,” Jo Ericksen and Margie Wherritt embrace an attitude of love, acceptance and compassion as they work side-by-side to help others.



Misty Warner of Missoula, and thousands of others across the country, are able to donate blood products again after the Food and Drug Administration updated its guidance related to Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease and international travel.

Montanan able to give again after changes for those who lived abroad

January’s bitter cold snap kept many of us bundled up inside as plans that required leaving the comfort of a heated home dropped almost as quickly as the temperatures themselves. But blood recipients can’t wait out winter – blood donations must continue, especially amidst an emergency blood shortage. In January, weather conditions caused nearly 15,000 blood products to go uncollected nationwide.

Fortunately, subzero conditions couldn’t keep blood donors in Missoula from their scheduled appointments. One of those undeterred by the wrath of old man winter was Misty Warner, whose cheerful personality carried a warmth of its own.

“OK, hook me up!” she exclaimed inside, dropping herself into the donor chair.

Misty is familiar with the American Red Cross donor center, having worked at the Missoula location as a phlebotomist years ago following cutbacks at a local lumber mill.

“I took a voluntary layoff because half the mill shut down,” she said. “So, I couldn’t find a job.”

What began as an unexpected turn would restart her donor journey years later. After working at the Red Cross, Misty enlisted in the Army and deployed to Germany. That time spent serving overseas put Misty at potential risk of contracting and spreading

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, or vCJD, making her ineligible to donate blood upon her return home.

But in 2022, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration updated its guidance related to international travel related to vCJD, allowing the Red Cross to accept donations from people who couldn’t previously give, including Misty.

“So, as soon as they lifted that, I was able to come in and start donating,” she said.

Since then, Misty has given blood and platelets as often as she can. Unable to donate for more than a decade, the Missoula resident now believes each opportunity is a privilege.

“I try to come in once a month,” she said, pointing to a stress ball in the shape of a cat. “I even have my own squeezey thing!”

Health concerns, regardless of the kind, can have a profound impact on our lives. Since Misty became newly eligible to donate blood, she’s hoped her donations reduce other uncertainties hospitals currently face – like a potential shortage of lifesaving blood products.

“If you donate, you’re healthy enough. And there’s so many people out there that aren’t healthy enough,” she said. “So, it’s like you get to do this, you’re able to do this. And that alone is an amazing thing.”

She urges first-time donors who are thinking of signing up for a drive to start

by giving a whole blood donation before giving a platelet donation because the process is quicker.

“It’s still helping. It’s not as time-consuming -- but, you don’t get the warm blankets,” she joked.

While blood donors won’t have time to get as cozy in the donor chair, since a blood donation lasts only about 10 minutes, they’ll still speak with the same skilled phlebotomists, who are experts in creating consistent and comfortable experiences. It’s a seemingly small gesture that could have a potentially lifesaving impact on hospitals, which depend on a steady supply of blood from returning donors.

Needles and medical equipment may be intimidating, but Misty says donating is worth the try and encourages people who may be weary to trust the process.

“Once you get all hooked up, it’s just warm blankets and Netflix,” she said with another big grin.

Soon, the Missoula resident is all hooked up, tucked in and ready to watch her show while donating platelets. Helping save lives never looked more comfortable, and Misty said it feels even better.

“It’s just knowing that somewhere out there someone needs this, and I get to give it to you.”

— Story and photo by Keesley Van Middendorp

Volunteer experience survey debuts

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE SURVEY: All American Red Cross volunteers and volunteer supervisors (volunteers and employees) are invited to take a confidential and optional [seven-minute Volunteer Experience survey](#) and weigh in on what matters most to you when it comes to a positive volunteer experience at the Red Cross. No matter your tenure, line of business or reason you’re serving with the Red Cross, there are a set of core standards that a volunteer should expect while engaged with us. This is a new survey and different from the volunteer satisfaction survey.

The deadline to complete this survey is Friday, Feb. 9.

Click here to take the survey: <https://volunteerconnection.redcross.org/?readstate=1486417503>.

IN THE KNOW



RED CROSS NEWS & HAPPENINGS

(Note: You will be prompted to log into Volunteer Connection).

If you are unable to access Volunteer Connection, please take the survey at this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/5D5M8LK>

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION RECORDING: For those who were unable to attend last month’s volunteer recognition event here’s a link to the recording: <https://bit.ly/3vYnZZ6>.

ACTIVE ATTACKER TRAINING: Because of circumstances beyond our control, the active attacker training

scheduled for Feb. 6 has been postponed. Check back for more details.

POSITION OF THE MONTH: Imagine the impact you can make by helping a family who has lost everything in a disaster. Join our Disaster Action Team and be there for your neighbors when they need it most.

Your duties will include helping people find shelter, food, clothing and other necessities as they begin to recover. Disaster Action Team members are needed throughout our region, but especially in our rural communities.

The time commitment when responding to a disaster is approximately 2-3 hours. If you or someone you know are interested in this position, please reach out to Cami at idmt.recruiting@redcross.org.

FROM THE FIELD ...



Dr. Barton Hill and Nicole Sirak Irwin cut the ribbon at the unveiling of our new bloodmobile in Boise. The newly designed vehicle, pictured bottom right, has four donor beds and will allow Red Cross to collect blood at locations like workplaces and schools that might not otherwise be able to host a blood drive.



Idaho Gov. Brad Little, pictured here with Red Cross board members Melinda Merrill and Sayoko Kuwahara, donates blood at our recent Capitol blood drive. Secretary of State Phil McGrane also donated.



PHOTOS BY VOLUNTEER KEN STANTON

Hearts: Having someone to lean on

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and Claudia would go on to have two more children, raising six kids altogether.

“My children say that we are a successful family because we don’t have any ‘halfs’, or ‘steps, or anything,” Claudia said. “Everybody is brother and sister, and they treat each other that way.”

Through the years, their family bond would only grow stronger. So when Claudia’s brother, an airman who worked in security forces, shared worries about threats that could cut contact between relatives, everyone stopped to listen.

“He wanted us to have good communication with the family in case things didn’t go too well,” Claudia said.

The Warners got to work. They learned how to use HAM radios, received their licenses and created a communication plan from there. Their family would stay dialed in and connected during any catastrophe in the future, no matter where. But the couple realized their equipment could do a world of good for California communities in the present.

“We need to find something else to do with these expensive toys that we have,” Dave remembered saying.

The duo joined San Diego County’s

CERT, or Community Emergency Response Team. The program would eventually present an opportunity to join the Red Cross in order to prepare an emergency shelter in their community.

That shelter was never needed while they lived in California, but the pair’s time and talents were immediately put to good work after moving to Idaho Falls.

“We learned very quickly that Idaho needed a whole lot more help than San Diego did,” she said.

The Warners sprang into action, bringing their knowledge of emergency preparedness to every Red Cross disaster response and hosting preparedness fairs.

They also started and manage Bonneville County’s CERT team. Claudia is also president of Eastern Idaho VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters).

“So, it just keeps us busy and out of trouble while we’re retired,” they chuckled.

The Red Cross disaster action coordinators say they are almost always a package deal when responding to emergencies.

“It makes it a lot easier on the duty officer,” he said. “They call one place and if they get me, then they’ve got her and if they get her, then they’ve got

me.”

Caring for communities has become a natural part of caring for each other; things they love about one another have strengthened their disaster casework.

“Well, for me, I think it’s his patience with me and his thoughtfulness,” Claudia said.

“And she’s just the sweetheart all the time, and to everybody that she meets,” Dave continued. “And so, that kind of endears her to me.”

Dealing with tragedies takes a toll on everyone, which is why they’re glad to have each other at the end of the day.

They share this bit of advice to lovebirds, old and new:

Dave: “I would say every day, find the time when you can just watch her for a little while and just appreciate the things that she is and does. And then, remind yourself how lucky you feel. You need to do that. It can’t be just something that is in the back of your mind.”

Claudia said, “Look for the good in your sweetheart and let them know that you love and appreciate them; just thinking it in your head doesn’t necessarily relate out. It’s something that you’ve got to express, whether it’s physically, you know, a hug, or just saying, ‘I love you’ or ‘thank you.’”

— *Story by Keeley Van Middendorp*

Love: Communication, acceptance key

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and acceptance. Jo says her favorite things about her valentine are that “she’s willing to compromise, she’s funny, she makes me laugh every day and she really cares about people.”

Margie wrote, “Jo makes me smile and laugh! She’s very loyal and steadfast, and very giving. We like the same things, like reading, volunteering, the outdoors, camping, traveling.”

The Flathead County disaster responders share interests but bring different skillsets to the table of emergency preparedness in Montana. Jo is a retired nurse practitioner while Margie worked as an information and referral specialist for people with disabilities.

“She can do her health and mental

health services, and I can do the casework with her,” Margie wrote.

Teamwork certainly makes the dream work when it comes to this power couple; they’re lovingly dubbed “the Red Cross twofers” and have deployed nationally together multiple times.

“We find each Red Cross experience unique and never tire from volunteering,” Margie wrote.

The couple has a long history of using their time and talents to help local communities, including in the Coast Guard, but their love boat would eventually set sail toward the open shores of the Red Cross.

“(The Coast Guard) didn’t have the appreciation and feeling of giving to others as the Red Cross,” they wrote. (We) received trainings, recognition and

it fulfilled our need to help relieve suffering of those in disasters.”

They’re professionals in providing compassionate care; Margie and Jo know firsthand how it feels to be powerless after experiencing an emergency where the Red Cross stepped in to support displaced residents.

“We ourselves got stuck in a flood in a campground, were transported to a Red Cross shelter in town, and were very impressed. That did it for us!” they said.

The couple gives this advice to lovebirds, old and new: “Acceptance. Let each other be their own person, yet share fun things together. Communication is key, accepting challenge and growing from it.”

— *Story by Keeley Van Middendorp*