

RED ALERTS!



Keeping our volunteer partners engaged and informed



ON THE HORIZON

Missing Types campaign,

June 11-July 3, visit www.redcrossblood.org/MissingTypes to learn more.



22

Volunteers joined the Montana and Idaho Red Cross in May



13,275

Hours logged in May by 459 local volunteers.

16

Disaster responses in May. Families helped: 19.



MILESTONES

DALLAS ERICKSON, 10 years

DARWIN PUGMIRE, 10 years

MIKE RYAN, 10 years

SANDRA CAIN, 5 years

FRANK WILLY, 5 years

MARY WIEST, 5 years

MEET THE DUTY OFFICER: KATHY MELLINGER OF DILLON

'This is why we do this'

Kathy Mellinger was a new duty officer when a call came in that still sticks with her. Two disaster action team members were reporting in after returning from a late-night fire at a remote farm. Because of the intensity of the fire and at the direction of the fire chief, the women parked a long way from the fire and walked to the scene in the dark, encountering a canal filled with water and plenty of other obstacles.

When they arrived, they found five young men wearing nothing but their pajamas, shivering in the cold as they watched everything they owned, including their life savings, burn. The responders wrapped them in blankets and comforted them. The farm workers spoke only a few words of English and were in complete disbelief that someone would come all this way in the dark to find them. They fought off tears as they tried to thank those Red Cross volunteers.

"I was getting a little choked up when the DAT (responder) said in a tired but confident voice, 'This is why we do this,'" Mellinger said. "And I thought, 'Yes it is.'"

Mellinger joined the Red Cross of Greater Idaho and Montana in 2016, already with decades of volunteerism under her belt.



Kathy Mellinger's support team includes her two dogs, Jick and Karma. She has served as a duty officer since 2016.

She's been a camp counselor and literacy tutor, a children's grief support facilitator and an equine-assisted therapy assistant.

The Mellingers always planned to retire to Montana because of family ties and love of the outdoors. They bought property in the 2000s and built an off-grid home north of Dillon, where she retired after 30 years

STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 2

Caught you at your best



Red Cross staffers and volunteers teamed up in Billings in May to install 80 smoke alarms and make 60 homes safer. Twenty-nine children were made safer because of these efforts.



LEFT: Disaster Program Manager Abbra Firman distributes supplies to volunteers Michelle Kay and Alex Shin. ABOVE: Montana board chairman Tom Wozniak installs a bed shaker alarm for former Red Cross volunteer Ron Wachtman.

In the know: Welcome to the team

■ **FUNDRAISING:** Bryce Sitter will join the Red Cross of Greater Idaho and Montana in early July as the regional chief development officer. He was worked for non-profits for 20 years, most recently as a regional philanthropy officer in fund development in Iowa. During his career, he spent more than a



decade in East Africa, addressing needs such as food security, education and disease prevention. Bryce and his wife have two children, Karsten, 4, and Levi, 6.

■ **VOLUNTEER SERVICES:** Thank you to all of our Volunteer Services team members. We have 24 volunteers who do everything from intake to training. Because of their hard work, we have recruited and

placed 350 new volunteers this year!

■ **DAT CHANGES:** Important Disaster Action Team structure changes are happening throughout the country. Please look for an email from Catherine Rawsthorne titled "IMPORTANT Changes to DAT Program." Direct questions to your leadership teams, or to catherine.rawsthorne2@americanredcross.onmicrosoft.com.

Sunshine in a storm

Idaho volunteer moved by act of ‘puppy love’ during hurricane deployment

Diana Ochsner has deployed many times with the Red Cross through the years, from Colorado to Kentucky, North Carolina to Louisiana. But one story from a deployment to Sugar Land, Texas, last fall following Hurricane Harvey has stuck with her more than most.

It’s a story of kindness, serendipity and a little puppy love.

Ochsner, of Jerome, and fellow Red Cross volunteer Julie Fox, of Rochester, N.Y., were at a kitchen operation in Sugar Land when a car pulled up. A woman got out, puppy in hand. She was a Hurricane Harvey survivor who was leaving the state, and she dropped the puppy in Fox’s lap and quickly drove away.

Ochsner and Fox got the little guy some water and then went to a store to buy him food. Ochsner called the local shelter to see if they could take the animal, but they were so overwhelmed following the hurricane it took them several days to call back.

So Fox stepped in, caring for the abandoned pup.

A shelter eventually took the dog, assuring Fox she could visit him anytime, which she did as often as possible. They had become quite attached, and both cried each time it came time for Fox to leave.

A few days later, the shelter called to see if Fox wanted to adopt the Catahoula. Fox agreed.

“All of us were crying,” said Ochsner, who has volunteered with the Red Cross of Greater Idaho since 2012. “We all got attached to



Idaho volunteer Diana Ochsner, right, hugs Julie Fox of Rochester, N.Y., after Fox agreed to adopt a puppy left behind during Hurricane Harvey.

the orphaned puppy very quickly, but Julie and the puppy bonded immediately. The deployment was a very difficult one so when this event happened, it was a little sunshine in the middle of a bad storm.”

An American Red Cross media team happened to be in Sugar Land at the time and photographed the whole thing.

A week later, the pup was bound for his new home in Rochester, riding in a crate donated by the shelter.

For Fox, this new friendship had special meaning, a friendship born from the ashes. The year before, Fox lost her cat and dog to a home fire.

She gave her little hurricane survivor a fitting name – Harvey.

“Everything happens for a reason,” Fox said. “This puppy was meant for me to take back home.”

“Everything happens for a reason. This puppy was meant for me to take back home.”



Julie Fox and Harvey formed a special bond almost immediately after they met.

“He has been a ray of sunshine. My hope is the past owners know what an unselfish act they bestowed on him given their situation. And they can rest easy knowing he is well taken care of.”

— By Matt Ochsner

Mellinger: No two calls are the same

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as a chemist with Battelle Toxicology Northwest in Richland, Wash. After the move, she began looking online for a new volunteer opportunity. That’s when she found information about the Red Cross.

“I had not intended to be a duty officer when I looked through the opportunities but have always believed that a volunteer should go where they are needed, and at that time, I was told our region really needed duty officers,” she said.

As a duty officer, Mellinger takes calls from the field during disasters such as a house fire — calls that often come from fire departments or emergency dispatch, but sometimes directly from the families themselves. She finds a local team who can respond, coordinates that deployment, helps chart a roadmap for client assistance and verifies the disaster responders make it home safely.

“No two calls are ever the same,” she said. “You have to get the basics and decide how best to deal with it.

YOUR TURN: *Would you like to become a duty officer? Visit www.montanaredcross.org to learn more.*

You can’t write everything in the manual.”

She’s hospice trained and has a background in grief support, which has helped prepare her for the emotional ups and downs that come with being a duty officer. She also works part time in registration at the local emergency room — another good training ground for those in the world of disaster.

Though she has never met any of the Red Cross disaster responders in person, she has tremendous respect for what they do and why they do it.

“I speak to some of them several times and I think ‘man, do you ever sleep,’” Mellinger laughed.

“It’s a calling, a passion for them. They are genuine and caring. They know that if they don’t do it, that person is standing out there in one of the worst times of their life wonder-

ing why no one is out there to help them.”

Mellinger works the 6 a.m. to noon shift mostly, backed by her support team — her husband Sean and their two dogs, Karma and Jick. Sean keeps the computer and phones working while Karma and Jick get her up in the morning and lay on the office couch while she reviews cases before her shift starts.

“Spend 10 hours volunteering with Red Cross and you will have a 100 percent different view of the organization,” she said. “When you stop and think of the enormity of this organization and how well it functions with the number of volunteers it has, it boggles my mind. It will change your heart.”

In 2017, Mellinger also became a duty officer coach.

“I consider it a privilege to be a tiny part of the American Red Cross team,” she said.

“A lot of times when someone is in pain people shy away from them. We at the Red Cross go toward that person.”

— By Matt Ochsner