



Neighbors Helping Neighbors

“The best emergency gear is other people.” “When the Big One hits, you’re going to need friends (and their skills) just as much as you’ll need the right supplies.” (WIRED Magazine, 9/29/2019).

As much as we celebrate and appreciate our professional emergency responders – fire fighters, police officers, and public works crews – government resources are limited, and whatever might be available in a major disaster will be deployed to handle the most serious and dangerous situations. Many people will be left on their own for hours, maybe days. This is where neighbors can be the greatest resource in an emergency.

The concept isn’t new. According to the National Volunteer Fire Council, 65% of firefighters in the United States are volunteers. When the Loma Prieta Earthquake struck in October, 1989, I was lucky that one of these trained volunteers lived on my block. My wife was six months pregnant and home alone in the house we had purchased a month before, and I was stuck in a massive traffic jam in San Francisco as people rushed to escape the scene of burning buildings and collapsed bridges. Imagine my relief when I managed to reach my wife by mobile phone to hear that our neighbor had gone door to door, checking on everyone and making sure there were no gas leaks! It would be fully four hours before we could make it back to San José that evening.

When a major 8.1 magnitude earthquake struck Mexico City in 1985, volunteers rushed to help and helped rescue about 800 people from the rubble. Unfortunately approximately 100 of these volunteers lost their own lives in the process. The Los Angeles Fire Department studied the event, seeking how to leverage the willingness of volunteers to help others, but at the same time minimize the risk of death or serious injury to the volunteers. This effort led to the development of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program, which was standardized by FEMA in 1993 and is now taught across the United States and in some foreign countries. San José previously had a program known as San José Prepare, and commenced a formal CERT program in 2019 to provide free training for its residents.

Naglee Park is uniquely situated along a stretch of Coyote Creek - at 63 miles the longest waterway in the County, which provides storm drainage for over 320 square miles of watershed, and a portion of the City’s network of 875 miles of storm drains. Since the construction of Anderson Dam in 1950, the mid-Coyote Creek area (from Montague Expressway on the North to Tully Road on the... (continued on page 2)



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(continued from page 1) ...South), has only overtopped its banks when a combination of heavy rains have caused the Anderson Dam spillway to overflow. Two of these events - one in 1997 and the most recent in 2017 - took place without any government warnings, one on Superbowl Sunday and the other on President's Day Weekend. In both instances, when calls to government officials or 911 proved futile, Naglee Park neighbors stepped up to help those living along the creek to move furniture and possessions to higher ground, collect and stack sandbags, and help provide hot meals, showers, and open their homes and kitchens in the days that followed. Even when emergency crews finally responded, they had to focus on the hardest hit areas, like the mobile home parks and the lower-lying neighborhoods like Rock Springs.

During the official "Shelter-at-Home" period of the Covid19 pandemic, Naglee Park residents, many of whom were part of our Ready Naglee Park CERT program, and others who had previously completed the training under the San Jose Prepared program, stepped up to serve as "Block Captains" to make sure that everyone on every block was accounted for, and to coordinate delivery of food and essential supplies when most stores were closed or operating under restrictions. In the weeks that followed, this collective effort to help our neighbors with essential needs continued as the CCA provided much-needed relief in the form of the portable "Porch-Fest" on trucks, and in the proudest of traditions, the no-contact 4th of July Parade. Never underestimate the importance of boosting morale as an essential component of emergency response!

Officially, planning for disaster response is the responsibility of local government officials. They are charged with the responsibility to evaluate the potential risks of various hazards, from earthquakes to wildfires, from chemical spills to power failures, from flooding to severe wind events, as well as deliberate acts of sabotage and terrorism, and provide the resources and staffing necessary. However, as we know, the high cost of housing means that a significant percentage of our first responders do not live locally, and may be unavailable to show up. Equipment and resources are only as good as there are trained personnel to operate them, and they are expensive and in limited supply. The bottom line is that for the first few hours or even days following a disaster, we may be on our own, and very dependent on our good neighbors for help, support and yes, comfort.

No matter where you live in the greater San José area, you are eligible to take the CERT training class offered by the City. The 20-hour program covers a range of useful and practical tips on how you can better prepare yourself... (continued on page 3)



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(continued from page 2) ...and your household for a disaster, reduce the risk of serious injury or death in your own home, and how to safely and effectively help your neighbors if you are able. Classes are offered throughout the year both in-person and in hybrid formats. Consider taking the time to become better prepared to be a Good Neighbor in the event of a disaster!

Jeffrey B Hare is currently one of the CERT Instructors for San José, and organized and coordinate Ready Naglee Park. He started my Disaster Preparedness training when he was assigned to the City of Sunnyvale DPS as part of his USAF Reserve duties. Jeffrey then went to work for Sunnyvale, and participated in various EOC training exercises. In 1989, he helped with the coordinated volunteer response to the Loma Prieta Earthquake, and in 2005 volunteered with the Red Cross to go to Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. He lives near Coyote Creek in downtown San José, and helped coordinate neighbors' response to two floods, one in 1997 and the other in 2017. He is a member of SJ RACES, and initiated the collective effort to develop the CERT GMRS emergency radio network that runs every Tuesday evening. In 2021, he was honored to be the recipient of the OEM Volunteer of the Year Award. Jeffrey teaches part time at SJSU.