

THE EUREKA REPORTER

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The original charter that created the Humboldt County chapter of the American Red Cross is on display at the Clarke Museum, along with photos of volunteers, artifacts and pamphlets. Laura Provolt/The Eureka Reporter

History of Red Cross now on display

by Laura Provolt, 5/5/2007

The role of the local chapter of the American Red Cross in Humboldt County history is portrayed at the Clarke Museum in an exhibit marking the chapter's 90th anniversary. A reception was held at the museum Saturday night for Arts Alive!, and the exhibit will be up throughout June.

Pam Service, curator of the museum, said the HCARC was formed in May 1917 in response to World War I. The charter for the creation of the branch, signed May 16, is on display in the exhibit.

She said the first action the local Red Cross took after forming was to give a 1-pound box of candy to each soldier leaving for the war. She said they then began to collect clothing and knit scarves, care for families with soldiers at war and other services, which they continued for World War II as well.

Service said the Red Cross also provided disaster aid to those who lost homes as a result of fire, and began to learn about disaster response and preparedness.

"The Red Cross was very important to this area, as it is prone to natural disasters like floods and earthquakes," Service said. "They were especially active in the '50s and '60s, which was a period marked by quite a few natural disasters like the floods of '55 and '64; the local area was pretty much cut off from the outside world, and the Red Cross provided food, resources and aid to people."

Service said because of the characteristic fog and the rocky shore of the Humboldt County coastline, shipwrecks are another disaster the Red Cross has dealt with. She said the HCARC provided aid to the sailors of the wrecked ship the

USS Milwaukee, as they helped the sailors find shelter, food and clothing when they were stranded by the wreck.

Linda Nellist, community education programs director for the HCARC, said the branch developed over the years to expand education and disaster preparedness as well as disaster response. She said the local chapter is mandated by Congress to assist in times of disaster, and prepares for any hazards that could disrupt ordinary daily life, including man-made or natural disasters. She said she sees the future of the local Red Cross expanding training focused on educating a larger number of residents about disaster preparedness and emergency response techniques such as CPR, as well as expanding the number of volunteers trained for emergency response deployment.

Troy Teets, disaster response training coordinator, said there are nearly 90 trained volunteers currently used for first response to disasters. He said the HCARC sent 67 volunteers to the Hurricane Katrina disaster in New Orleans, and volunteers provided aid in 13 incidents in April in which families were displaced due to home fires.

Teets said it is very unusual to have so many incidents in one month, as usually they provide aid to about 25 such incidents each year. Because of the unexpected number, the disaster relief fund was depleted and it was necessary to dip into the HCARC's general fund, so they are in need of donations and volunteers.

For more information about the Humboldt County Red Cross, visit www.humboldtreddcross.org.

HOW TO VOLUNTEER FOR THE RED CROSS

Troy Teets, disaster response coordinator with the Humboldt County chapter of the American Red Cross, said the Red Cross will offer a series of trainings to initiate new volunteers interested in disaster response.

"Fulfilling our Mission" is a prerequisite single-evening course designed to introduce volunteers to disaster response, and the course is free of charge and does not obligate the participant to continue with the rest of the disaster response course. He said the courses will be offered on Monday and June 6 at the Humboldt County Red Cross headquarters at 406 11th St., Eureka.

Teets said a volunteer orientation will be offered May 16 from 5:30 to 7 p.m., which will explain the history and function of the Red Cross, as well as all options for potential Red Cross volunteers.

"The orientation will help people find their niche in the Red Cross, to see what they are interested in and what opportunity would be the most applicable to their expertise," Teets said.

He said registration before the courses is strongly recommended, and those interested can phone 707-443-4521 or visit www.humboldtreddcross.org.



American Red Cross nurses' uniforms from the 1940s (blue) and 1960s (gray) were loaned to the Clarke Museum by local ARC volunteers for the exhibit. Laura Provolt/The Eureka Reporter