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HERFORD COUNTY CITIZEN CORPS HOSTS FIRST CERT TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS

Citizens take proactive lead in preparing for emergencies



Hertford County's first set of CERT members pose for a shot following their March training which included disaster preparedness, fire safety and suppression, disaster medical operations, light search and rescue, disaster psychology, and disaster simulation. CERT is a federal program under the umbrella of Citizen Corps designed to help first responders in the event of a disaster or emergency by equipping everyday citizens with the skills they need to help themselves and their neighbors...safely. On the back row, from left to right: Dave Fisher, Charlie Everette, Joe Forbes, Como Mayor Irvin Stephens, Ann Riddick and Hertford County Emergency Management Director Charles Jones. In the front row: Mary Brown, Stephanny Marshall, Janice Weaver and Citizen Corps/CERT Coordinator Stephanie Duffey.

MURFREESBORO, N.C – “Neighbors helping neighbors.”

That’s the national motto of the CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) program and that’s exactly what the first group of CERT training graduates plans to put into practice and they’re encouraging others to do the same.

“It is better to have the training and not need it than need it and not have it,” said Hertford County CERT member

Charlie Everette.

Everette is among the growing number of Hertford County residents who have decided to take a proactive approach to disasters and emergencies by arming themselves with training to help them better prepare for disasters before they strike.

But, what is CERT?

CERT is a federal program that falls under the umbrella of Citizen Corps, a vital component of USA Freedom Corps, created in 2002 by President George W. Bush following the tragic events of September 11 to increase volunteerism in America and motivate citizens to be proactive with regard to emergency preparedness.

Overall, Citizen Corps challenges citizens “to embrace the personal responsibility to be prepared; to get training in first aid and emergency skills; and to volunteer to support local emergency responders, disaster relief, and community safety,” while the CERT program provides training and structure within that framework.

Coordinated nationally by the Department of Homeland Security, Citizen Corps is designed to help coordinate volunteer activities to make communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to any emergency situation.

So how did Citizen Corps and CERT get started in Hertford County?

It all started after Hurricane Isabel (2003) when FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Association) decided to conduct Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Projects to determine how communities communicate and respond after disaster. FEMA had a total of six demonstration projects planned, the first of which took place in Hertford County, an area hit hard by Hurricane Isabel. To initiate the studies, FEMA contracted MDC, Inc. a nonprofit based in Chapel Hill, , who subsequently asked Roanoke Electric Cooperative's subsidiary Roanoke Economic Development, Inc., to help with the project's coordination. The project called for citizens to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the county's and community's response to previous disasters/emergencies and brainstorm various strategies for addressing problems.

Prior to the conclusion of phase one of the project in November, the team arrived at the consensus that more citizens needed to be involved in their own preparedness and purposed to continue their efforts beyond the scope of the demonstration.

In October they received word from the state Citizen Corps office in Raleigh that their application to create an official Citizen Corps Council in Hertford County was granted and last month they participated in their first CERT training class. In December, Hertford County was awarded \$8,500 from the Department of Homeland Security towards the development of the new council and CERT.

“This is something we've wanted for a long time in Hertford County,” said Hertford County Commissioner John Pierce. “They have my full support.”

Participants in the CERT training learned about disaster preparedness, fire safety and suppression, disaster medical operations, light search and rescue, disaster psychology, and disaster simulation. Each participant will receive a certificate of completion from the state.

CERT training was made available nationally by FEMA in 1993. Hertford County will now be added to the list of communities in 28 States and Puerto Rico for conducting CERT training. There are presently more than 2,632 CERT programs in the country, 75 of which operate in North Carolina.

For more information on Hertford County Citizen Corps or CERT, or to volunteer, contact Stephanie Duffey at 252-539-2236 ext. 283 or by email at sduffey@roanokeelectric.com.