Eight Citizens Graduate from Disaster Course

Eight more Walton County citizens have graduated from the Community Emergency Response Team (C.E.R.T.), a program designed to train area residents on how to assist neighbors and emergency personnel during natural and man-made disasters. The team graduated on Tuesday, February 7, during “Hazardous Weather Awareness Week” in Florida and is now ready to handle emergencies in neighborhoods until emergency responders arrive on the scene of virtually any disaster.

“These eight citizens are now trained to help in first aid, search and rescue, and a myriad of other emergency responses during disasters,” says Jeff McVay, Walton County’s emergency management coordinator. “We’re real proud that these graduates can now help protect their communities through this very special program.”

More classes are now lined up to train citizens in emergency response procedures on February 26 in DeFuniak Springs at the Emergency Operations Center, 75 South Davis Lane and on March 6 at the South Walton Coastal Branch library on Greenway Trail behind the South Walton Courthouse Annex. For more information on becoming a C.E.R.T. member through this eight-day (32 hour) course, contact Ofelia Murphy, C.E.R.T. coordinator at 850-892-8065.

By Christopher Mitchell, Walton County Emergency Management

Make your disaster plan today at www.floridadisaster.org
Florida can be a winter retreat for many residents and visitors across Florida. Known for our mild temperatures, many visitors come south to escape the blustery conditions of the northern states. However, the same systems that sometimes bring the Northeast U.S. blizzard conditions also bring the southern states severe weather and tornadoes. Did you know that Florida is one of the most tornado-prone states, with only Texas, Kansas and Oklahoma reporting more tornadoes on average per year?

Florida is susceptible to tornadoes year-round. Even though June averages more tornadoes in Florida than any other month, the strongest tornadoes usually occur in late February and early March, with March historically being the deadliest month for tornadoes in Florida.

What makes this time of year prone to severe weather in Florida? It is this time of year, through early April, when strong cold fronts move through the Southeast U.S. bringing the potential for severe weather. Hurricanes and tropical storms can generate large numbers of tornadoes, but it is these “airmass” systems that bring Florida the most violent tornadoes and increased risk for severe weather during the winter and spring months.

In a typical frontal system approaching Florida, showers and thunderstorms will develop ahead of the cold front as warm moist Gulf air surges northward. These storms will likely form into a squall line ahead of the front creating the threat for damaging straight line winds and tornadoes.

An excellent way to ensure you receive all watches and warnings for your area is to have a NOAA Weather Radio. These radios can be programmed to deliver watch and warning information for your county.
Chip Wilson starts as First Statewide Disability Coordinator

Florida’s disabled community has a new advocate for emergency management. Chip Wilson was selected to become the first disability coordinator for the Florida Division of Emergency Management and will help to improve emergency response and preparedness for Florida’s special needs population. Chip is no stranger to disability advocacy, he has been working to improve access for the disabled for many years.

While a senior in high school in 1968, Chip Wilson became a paraplegic. He went on to complete high school and graduate with his class. He graduated from Jacksonville University with a Bachelors Degree in Sociology and later earned a Masters degree in Computer Resource and Information Management from Webster University.

After college, Chip worked as a Parole and Probation Officer for the State of Florida and then spent 23 years in the corporate world.

Chip has been involved with the Independent Living Resource Center of NE Florida, the Florida Independent Living Council, the accreditation task force for the Lane Wiley Senior Citizens Center in Jacksonville, the state’s Accessible Electronic Information Taskforce, the Business Leaders Network in Jacksonville and the Special Needs Shelter Taskforce of Duval County. In 2007, Chip was appointed by Florida Governor Charlie Crist to the Commission on Disabilities.

Chip has held a Certified Business Continuity Professional designation from the Disaster Recovery Institute International and currently holds the Accessibility Inspector/Plans Examiner certification from the International Codes Council.

Chip is the recipient of the Senator Stephen R. Wise Lifetime Achievement Award for his advocacy efforts.

Thomas Yatabe Award Winners Announced

In 1991, the State Emergency Response Commission established an awards program to annually recognize individuals, agencies, organizations, industries or businesses that make significant contributions to the state’s hazardous materials planning program. Renamed in 2001 to honor the late Mr. Thomas Yatabe of the Environmental Protection Agency Region 4, the SERC Awards Program allows each Local Emergency Planning Committee to submit a single nominee to be honored.

District winners:

District 1- Randy McDaniel
District 2- Richard Rhea
District 3- Cliff Chapman
District 4- Patrick Ross
District 5- Kevin Ford
District 6- Kimberly Loewen
District 7- Dan Bartle
District 8- Tommy Brown
District 9- Wayne Sallade
District 10- Charles Christopher
District 11- Don Perdue

This year, the statewide award went to Eve Rainey (right). Rainey has 21 years experience working in emergency management. (Left) Division 10 winner, Charles Christopher, receives his Thomas Yatabe Award.
Santa Rosa County Community Organizations Come Together

By Daniel Hahn, Santa Rosa County

Not often do we see a government program succeed as intended, but in the case of the inception of the Santa Rosa County Citizen Corps program we can proudly say our tax dollars are working for the people that paid them.

The Santa Rosa County Citizen Corps began in late 2006 and received a state Citizen Corps grant to begin partnering with volunteer agencies around the county. Partnering with the School District, Citizen Corps brought the Teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program to the County. Teen CERT is a Department of Homeland Security funded program provided by East Michigan State University. Teen CERT will be introduced in some Santa Rosa schools in the 2008-2009 school year, making them the first schools in the state providing this program. Teen CERT will introduce area teens to what some of the Santa Rosa County programs have to offer, like HAM radio, Neighborhood Watch and Volunteer Reception Centers, in an effort to start creating an environment of preparedness in the future of our nation, which is our children.

Santa Rosa is the proud home of the Navarre CERT team, a 501c3 organization that has logged over 7000 hours of volunteer time over the last year. This organization epitomizes community service by not only serving the Navarre area, but by enthusiastically making themselves available throughout the County whenever the Division of Emergency Management requires volunteer assistance.

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) of Santa Rosa is a growing organization that is also looking forward to introducing a Junior MRC in the future. The MRC has also partnered with the West Florida Area Health Education Center to provide continuing education to professional volunteers. This process assists with recruitment and with professional development.

The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) program is operated out of the Gulf Breeze Police Department and has volunteers who log several hundred hours a month. They have learned CPR, first aid and AED operation, in an effort to expand service to their community.

The Sheriffs Office sponsors the Neighborhood Watch program. This program has grown rapidly in the last year with the introduction of six new neighborhood watch groups. Additionally they are working in concert with local municipality police departments to further enhance both county and city Neighborhood Watch programs by introducing crime prevention classes as an educational component of each new program.

The Santa Rosa Citizen Corps Council is comprised of individuals from all of the above groups, plus our affiliates in the Amateur Radio Emergency Services, Volunteer Reception Center, American Red Cross, and 4-H.

These partnerships are examples of municipalities and the county working together and cooperating with each other. Partnerships are the key to success.

For more about the Santa Rosa Citizen Corps program and its affiliates please visit; http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/citizencorps/.

Douglas Wright Heads Division’s Recovery Operations

Douglas Wright has taken over as the Division of Emergency Management Recovery czar.

A veteran of the Air Force, Wright also has extensive experience in Emergency Management. He worked in Law Enforcement and Public Safety for 13 years. He served as the Emergency Management Director for Indian River County for four years and the Emergency Services Director for Indian River County for 13 years.

In Flagler County, Wright served as the Emergency Services Director for 3 ½ years and as the County Administrator for almost two years.

He has a Bachelor’s Degree from Florida State University in Criminology and a Master’s Degree in Criminal Justice from Nova Southeastern University.

Wright will lead the Division’s recovery efforts, working to provide disaster assistance to individuals and families through state and federal disaster recovery programs.
Larry Gispert, director for Hillsborough County Emergency Management in Tampa, Fla., was elected as the 2007-2008 president of the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM). 2006-07 President Michael D. Selves, CEM® passed the gavel to Gispert during the Presidential Banquet Nov. 14 in Reno, Nev. Gispert pledged to the members of IAEM he will further develop and continue to strengthen the overall IAEM organization, including assisting the current 700 international members residing in 44 countries outside the United States with their needs. He plans to facilitate the shift in the organizational structure and have the non-U.S. councils focus on interests in their specific regions while a new IAEM-USA council can focus on issues concerning those U.S. based members.

“Forming a new international structure has been challenging this organization for the past several years,” said Larry Gispert. “It’s time to stop talking and start doing and make this organization even stronger since emergencies do happen all over the world.”

Gispert has 27 years of experience in the field of emergency management, having been employed by Hillsborough County (Fla.) Emergency Management since 1980. In 1993, he became the director of the County’s Emergency Management Department.

Gispert is known by his peers to be a very knowledgeable emergency manager, willing to help anyone at any time. Throughout his career he has been deployed more than a dozen times to help other communities recover from the effects of storms or other types of disasters. The first major significant storm he handled was Hurricane Elena in 1985.

Gispert is certified by the Florida Emergency Preparedness Association (FEPA) as a Professional Emergency Manager (FPEM) and has been an active member in both FEPA and IAEM for a number of years. While with FEPA, he was elected president in 2000 and prior to that he was FEPA treasurer for two years. His activities with IAEM include election as IAEM Region IV president from 2004 to 2006. In 2006-07, he was elected the IAEM first vice president.

The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) is a non-profit organization consisting of nearly 4,000 emergency management professionals from local, state and the federal governments, military, private industry and volunteer organizations. IAEM has consistently promoted the goals of saving lives and protecting property during emergencies and disasters since its founding in 1952 as the U.S. Civil Defense Council.
What would you do if a nearby chemical plant suddenly exploded or perhaps a major gas line was deliberately ruptured in your neighborhood? Do you have a plan? Would you know how to protect your family, home or business?

For the past several years, the State Emergency Response Commission for Hazardous Materials and the eleven Local Emergency Planning Committees have recognized a week in January as Hazardous Materials Awareness Week. This year, Governor Crist proclaimed January 20-26, 2008 as Hazardous Materials Awareness Week in Florida.

During this week, the Local Emergency Planning Committees sponsored activities within their regions to promote the awareness of hazardous materials in communities and the potential hazards associated with them. Some of their activities included: Shelter-In-Place Demonstration; Hazardous Materials Awareness Level Training; Propane Gas Training; interviews and/or public service announcements aired on local government cable channels around Florida; “How-to-Comply” workshops providing technical assistance on the chemical inventory reporting requirements of the Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act.

As recent events in Jacksonville and Tampa illustrate, there are potential risks associated with hazardous materials that are a part of our modern life and understanding what this means to you is important.

As a result of a tragic chemical accident in Bhopal, India in 1984, the U. S. Congress passed the Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act (“Act”) requiring states to create a State Emergency Response Commission and Local Emergency Planning Committees to implement this federal legislation. Section 311/312 of the “Act” requires certain facilities that have hazardous materials to annually report their inventories to the State Emergency Response Commission, their Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) and their local fire department. This information is available to residents upon request to the State Emergency Response Commission or their LEPC. The Technological Hazards Section housed in the Bureau of Preparedness is staff to the State Emergency Response Commission and is the collector and retainer of these chemical inventory reports.

Statewide, the 11 LEPC’s also serve to train our first responders and give emergency officials the technical assistance to safely handle hazardous materials incidents.

Take the time to learn more about the potential hazards you may face in your community. To get a plan please go to: www.FloridaDisaster.org For additional information regarding the Commission or the requirements of the Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act, contact Technological Hazards Section at (850) 413-9970.

Residents in Florida should be aware of the following:

- Which facilities and chemicals may be located near you
- Evacuation routes for your home, workplace and your children’s schools
- Shelter-in-place procedures
- Industry and community warning systems
- Prepare a family and/or a business plan
Disability Roundtable at 2008 FEPA Conference

Emergency Management officials got together for an important discussion on disability issues during the 2008 Florida Emergency Preparedness Association conference in St. Petersburg.

The discussion served to stimulate communication between county Emergency Management professionals, the Division of Emergency Management and Federal Emergency Management Agency. It also provided an opportunity for local officials to ask questions regarding accessibility issues in their shelters and preparedness planning and for Federal officials to hear some “Florida specific” issues.

(Above) Division of Emergency Management Director Craig Fugate speaks during a disability roundtable discussion at the Florida Emergency Preparedness Association conference.

Delegation of Japan’s Young Political Leaders Visits State Emergency Operations Center

On January 24, a group of delegates from Japan visited the State Emergency Operations Center. The group’s visit was part of a two-week political exchange program organized by the American Council of Young Political Leaders (ACYPL) designed to expose the delegates to the American political system at the national, state and local levels.

During their stay in Tallahassee, the young political leaders also met with several City and County officials, toured the Florida Capitol, Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare, the Leon County Jail, two local universities.

Founded in 1966, the ACYPL is a bi-partisan, not-for-profit international exchange organization dedicated to fostering lasting political, economic and cultural ties between the next generation of political leaders around the globe.

The exchange program is designed to give delegates an opportunity to engage in candid dialogue with senior government and political officials, industry executives and community leaders on a wide range of political, cultural, and economic topics such as land conservancy and immigration.

(Left) Japanese visitors listen to a briefing from emergency management officials during a visit to the State Emergency Operations Center.

(Above) Employees from the Division of Emergency Management pose for a photo with visitors from Japan.

(Left) Delegation of Japan’s Young Political Leaders Visits State Emergency Operations Center.

2008 Poster and Essay Contest

(Above) Deputy State Meteorologist Amy Godsey judges poster entries along with representatives from the National Weather Service, Tallahassee, and the North Florida Chapter of the American Meteorological Society at the Capital Area Red Cross chapter.

(Below) Shelbi Fennell, second place winner of the statewide poster contest, is honored by the Red Cross during a ceremony at the historic State Capitol February 4 for Hazardous Weather Awareness Week. (Far Left) Statewide poster contest winner Adam Carr, 2nd from right, poses with his family and Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp next to his winning poster for Hazardous Weather Awareness Week. (Near left) Austin Lowery, Region 1 winner of the Hazardous Weather Awareness Week Essay Contest receives a check for $250 during a ceremony February 4th at the Historic State Capitol.

Spring Creek Elementary Visit

(Lefl) State Meteorologist Ben Nelson reads to children during a visit to Spring Creek Elementary School in Paisley, Fla., to promote Hazardous Weather Awareness

Each day of Hazardous Weather Awareness Week focused on a specific weather event:

**Monday**- Lightning

**Tuesday**- Marine Hazards and Rip Currents

**Wednesday**- Tornadoes and Thunderstorms

**Thursday**- Hurricanes and Flooding

**Friday**- Temperature Extremes and Wildfires
Governor Charlie Crist proclaimed February 2-9, 2008 as an expanded “Hazardous Weather Awareness Week” in Florida. Multiple events are planned statewide as state, county and local emergency officials seek to educate residents on topics such as; lightning, tornadoes, floods and rip currents.

Annual Tornado Drill

(Right) Fourth graders from Florida State University Schools practice “getting small against the wall” February 8 during the annual tornado drill for Hazardous Weather Awareness Week.

(Above) Division of Emergency Management lead public information officer, Mike Stone, speaks to fourth graders from Florida State University Schools about disaster preparedness after students participated in the statewide tornado drill February 8.

Groundhog Day Tornado Memorial

(Right) Employees from the Division of Emergency Management gather in the halls during the statewide tornado drill February 8.

(Above Left) Division of Emergency Management Director Craig Fugate speaks during a memorial to honor the anniversary of the 2007 Groundhog Day tornadoes. (Above Center) A plaque commemorates the 21 people who lost their lives in the 2007 Groundhog Day tornadoes.

(Right) Students from Florida State University Schools move out of temporary classrooms to hard shelter during a tornado drill February 8 in Tallahassee.

(Right) Citizens gather during a memorial in Lady Lake for the one year anniversary of the groundhog day tornadoes.
Florida has entered into a second year of drought conditions, as statewide average rainfall deficits during 2006-07 are the largest observed since the mid 1950s. According to the National Drought Monitor, approximately 20% of Florida is experiencing severe to extreme drought conditions as of January 1st, 2008. The drought has been most pronounced in southwest Florida and the Kissimmee River watershed. As a result, the average elevation of Lake Okeechobee has remained at or near daily record low levels since last Spring and is currently more than 4 feet below the historical average elevation for mid-January. Streamflows are below normal across much of Florida. Moderate La Nina conditions in the equatorial Pacific are expected to intensify the drought in Florida during the Winter and Spring months.

“Disasters such as droughts and wildfires know no borders, so I applaud the efforts today by these responders and emergency officials to make a difference before the next event occurs.”

-- Governor Charlie Crist

The State of Florida Drought/Wildfire Summit was held in Tallahassee at the State Emergency Operations Center on Tuesday, January 15, 2008. Over 150 participants listened to presentations on the dry season forecast, current status and future trends in water supply, the outlook for the wildfire season and the effects on the business community. Breakout Sessions allowed for facilitated interaction and discussion of fire resources and aviation, economic impacts, public information, the fire management declaration process and meeting (water) needs and drought impacts.

**Current Drought Conditions**

- Drought is affecting the entire Southeast, is continuing and is enhanced by the weather pattern called La Nina.
- South and southwest Florida are in the most severe situation in terms of the drought.
- Lake Okeechobee has reached all-time record low levels of water and it will take several significant tropical events to return the Lake to normal levels.
- Severe wildfires are a continuing threat as a result of the severe drought while resources will be in shorter supply due to the entire Southeast United States being affected and drawing from the same resource pool.
- Rainfall through May will be a key as to whether an extended and severe wildfire season will be realized unless normal rainfall levels return.
- Small businesses may fail and unemployment will rise for those businesses and employees directly affected by the drought.
- Agriculture, fishing industries and the cattle business will suffer from the affects of the drought.
- Public education is the key to water conservation and wildfire prevention. Programs such as Firewise, a program for educating the public on how to protect themselves and their property from the affects of wildfire will be vital.
- Water use restrictions on agricultural and public water supply will increase and water quality will decrease if the drought continues.

**Items Discussed**

- Drought is affecting the entire Southeast, is continuing and is enhanced by the weather pattern called La Nina.
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- Public education is the key to water conservation and wildfire prevention. Programs such as Firewise, a program for educating the public on how to protect themselves and their property from the affects of wildfire will be vital.
- Water use restrictions on agricultural and public water supply will increase and water quality will decrease if the drought continues.
Eileen Mann was chosen as the Division’s Employee of the Month for December 2007. Eileen is a pleasant, hard-working individual who has played an important part in the development and execution of the Division’s travel and procurement functions. Many changes have been made over recent months in an effort to streamline and expedite these processes, and Eileen has tackled her job with willingness, diligence and tenacity, always seeing assignments through to the end with courtesy and professionalism. For these reasons and many others, Eileen was chosen as the Employee of the Month.

Danny Kilcollins was chosen as the Division’s Employee of the Month for January 2008. As the Administrator of the Infrastructure Section, Danny has been instrumental in assisting our partners at the county level with the construction of new Emergency Operations Centers, increasing shelter capacities, leading the effort for special needs generators at shelters as well as coordinating the Disaster Motor Fuel Supplier Program. His willingness to take the time to assist with, and explain the processes involved in these large scale projects to our partners at the county level, as well as to legislative staff has been a valuable asset to the Division. Danny’s tireless work ethic to ensure these projects are seen through to completion is a just one example of his dedication to ensure our citizens and those responding to disasters are safe when disaster strikes. He always does an outstanding job and is always willing to pitch in and do whatever he can to assist the team. For these reasons and many others, Danny Kilcollins was chosen as the Employee of the Month for January 2008.

Wilma Spence was chosen as the Division’s Employee of the Month for February 2008. Wilma Spence is a hard-working employee who is consistently going above and beyond the call of duty to assist the entire Division with administrative and personnel matters on a daily basis. Her willingness to step in and coordinate the Division’s personnel functions, along with her other duties, until a new employee can be hired clearly demonstrate her dedication to the Division. Since she assumed these additional duties, there has been a notable improvement in the processes and time needed to complete personnel actions. This is in large part due to her outstanding experience and understanding of the personnel operations of the Division and DCA. The detailed accuracy and completeness of her work has resulted in fewer items being returned for additional comments or corrections.
SERT Participates in St. Lucie Nuclear Power Plant Drill

Federal, State and Local officials in cooperation with Florida Power and Light participated in a drill exercise at the St. Lucie Nuclear Power plant February 20-21. This drill was unique in that it was the first ingestion pathway exercise in Florida in six years. Participating agencies got a chance to work through their emergency plan for Radiological Emergencies, focusing on the impact on food safety and agriculture in Florida after a potential radiological release. This drill was evaluated in St. Lucie and at the State Emergency Operations Center in Tallahassee by observers from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

(Right) Members of an incident management team (IMT) from the Florida Division of Emergency Management discuss protective actions during a drill at the St. Lucie Nuclear Power Plant. (Above) IMT Incident Commander Donald Kunish briefs participants during a drill at the St. Lucie Nuclear Power Plant.

2008 Spring Drought Outlook

By State Meteorologist Ben Nelson

A change in jet stream winds has shifted the storm track southward during the last half of the winter season, bringing copious amounts of rainfall to north Florida. According to the February 28th National Drought Monitor, approximately one-third of Florida is still experiencing drought conditions, with the severe to extreme drought classification areas located to the south of the Interstate 4 corridor in central and especially southwest Florida. While drought conditions have been largely eliminated in the Florida panhandle, the Florida peninsula is still at risk to experiencing a severe wildfire season as the drought enters its second year. One of the gauges of the Florida peninsula’s drought status is the average elevation of Lake Okeechobee. Although the Lake’s average elevation has remained steady near the 10 foot level during the past few months, this height is still more than a foot below the average elevation at the beginning of March 2007. Drought conditions during the spring months of 2007 dropped the average elevation to a record low of 8.82 feet in July 2007.

The Climate Prediction Center’s Seasonal Drought Outlook points to strong La Nina conditions in the equatorial Pacific as the driving factor behind the forecast worsening of drought conditions during the spring months in the Florida peninsula. La Nina is defined as a period of colder than average waters that spans the equatorial Pacific waters, and this phenomenon tends to displace the storm track well to the north of Florida during the Spring months. This La Nina pattern also tends to produce above average temperatures during the spring months that can combine with existing drought conditions and periodic stretches of low relative humidity to enhance the threat and spread of wildfires. The last time that La Nina reached this strength in the equatorial Pacific was during the late 1998-2001 episode, which coincided with the last multi-year drought that impacted Florida. It should be noted that during one of Florida’s most severe wildfire episodes during the spring and early summer of 1998, flooding rains extended into the month of March before an abrupt shift in the weather pattern that quickly plunged the state into a severe short-term drought. A significant freeze that extended into southwest Florida in early January combined with sporadic rains during the winter months sets the stage for another active wildfire season during the spring months of 2008 in the Florida peninsula. An excellent website that assists Florida’s communities and businesses in preparing for increased wildfire activity is www.firewise.org.